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Front Cover Image: Confluence of Jaldhaka, a transnational river,
and Jholung Khola, a lively rivulet, with Bhutan hills in the backdrop.
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Editorial

It gives me immense pleasure to present the inaugural issue of *Confluence: Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences & Commerce* (ISSN: 3107-5568), a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed open-access e-journal published by Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College, Kolkata, a centre for academic excellence affiliated to the University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India.

The title *Confluence* symbolizes the journal's vision — to serve as an intellectual convergence of diverse streams of thoughts, ideas, perspectives, voices, disciplines, and scholarship, among others. In this spirit, the present issue is organized into five thematic sections that reflect the journal's commitment to interdisciplinarity, critical thinking, and relevance to contemporary concerns.

While *Section I* explores identity, trauma, and philosophical inquiry through literary analysis, *Section II* shifts the focus to ethical philosophy. *Section III* highlights cultural studies and historical inquiry, whereas *Section IV* engages with contemporary issues in commerce and sustainability. *Section V* presents critical reflections on Bengali literature, with essays on Kazi Nazrul Islam's prose, Amar Mitra's fiction, and Rabindranath Tagore's *Shesher Kobita*. Together, these contributions seek to bridge the conventional disciplinary divides, making *Confluence* a vibrant space for ideas, inquiry, and scholarship.

We are grateful to our contributors, reviewers, and the esteemed members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards, whose expertise and encouragement have been invaluable in shaping this issue. We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Hon'ble Administrator of Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College for his unwavering support and motivation in launching this academic venture.

We hope this inaugural issue of *Confluence* will inspire further inquiry, dialogue, and insights across disciplines. We invite scholars, researchers, educators, and students to contribute to and engage with future issues of the journal as we continue on this exciting interdisciplinary journey.

Dr. Pragyan Mohanty
Editor-in-chief
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Echoes of the Ancestors: Postcolonial Refractions of Tradition and Modernity in Indigenous Hindi Literature of Arunachal Pradesh

Subhashis Banerjee[†]

Abstract

This paper explores the dialectic between tradition and modernity in the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh, offering a postcolonial interpretation of how cultural memory, resistance, and adaptation manifest in the region's literary narratives. Situated at the interstice of orality and textuality, these works grapple with the encroachment of hegemonic structures—be it in the form of linguistic homogenisation, developmentalism, or post-independence nation-building—while also reclaiming rooted epistemologies through literary expression. Employing postcolonial frameworks such as Bhabha's hybridity, Spivak's subalternity, and Fanon's psychological decolonisation, this study analyses selected literary voices that articulate the region's complex negotiation with identity, temporality, and sovereignty. Rather than romanticising indigenous stasis or promoting cultural essentialism, the paper situates the literature as a site of resistance, where tradition is not a relic but a dynamic interlocutor in the discourse of modernity.

Keywords: Indigenous literature, Arunachal Pradesh, postcolonial theory, tradition and modernity, subaltern voice

Introduction: Locating the Question

The state of Arunachal Pradesh, nestled in the easternmost reaches of the Indian subcontinent, presents a paradox in the national imagination. Despite its rich plurality of cultures, languages, and oral traditions, it has long remained on the margins of both mainstream historiography and literary scholarship. Often stereotyped as a geographical periphery or an anthropological curiosity, Arunachal Pradesh and its people have struggled for discursive visibility in the Indian nation-state's narrative. This marginality, however, is not merely cartographic but epistemic. It involves a systemic neglect of indigenous knowledge systems,

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cultural memories, and literary voices that resist the homogenising ideologies of progress and nationhood. Within this context, the emergence of indigenous Hindi literature in Arunachal Pradesh assumes remarkable significance.

To situate this literature within the postcolonial debate on tradition and modernity is to unearth a layered struggle: one that is simultaneously cultural, linguistic, political, and philosophical. Writing in Hindi—India's most widely spoken language—tribal authors from Arunachal Pradesh occupy a peculiar double-bind. On one hand, they gain access to a broader national readership and institutional legitimacy; on the other, they risk diluting the linguistic and cultural specificity of their native traditions. Yet, rather than viewing this ambivalence as a limitation, it is more productive to interpret it as a space of negotiation—a space where literary expression becomes an act of reclamation as well as reinvention.

The emergence of Hindi as a medium of literary expression in the region was not merely a cultural evolution but a politically mediated project. Governmental institutions, including the Arunachal Pradesh Sahitya Akademi and centralised curricular bodies such as NCERT, encouraged the adoption of Hindi to bridge regional differences and integrate diverse communities under a unified national framework (Bharali, 2019, p. 112). This imposition, however, also paved the way for a counter-hegemonic discourse, where Hindi was appropriated to serve indigenous ends. Writers like Dr. Nida Ahmed, Tani Talom, and Gomia Ete began to deploy the very language of the state to critique its developmental paradigms, ecological violence, and epistemic erasures (Kashyap, 2020, p. 144).

These literary interventions foreground a deep tension between the ancestral and the aspirational. The former represents a rooted cosmology, based on reciprocal relationships between land, language, and community; the latter invokes a forward-looking ideology rooted in modernisation, often tethered to extractive economies, individual mobility, and cultural dislocation. This dialectic between tradition and modernity is not unique to Arunachal Pradesh, but its articulation through indigenous Hindi literature adds a complex valence. It raises fundamental questions: Can modernity be indigenised without cultural rupture? Can the language of the 'centre' voice the experiences of the 'periphery'? And perhaps most crucially, can literature act as a medium through which these tensions are not merely represented but also reimagined?

From a postcolonial perspective, the use of Hindi by tribal writers is both an act of strategic subversion and cultural negotiation. These authors repurpose Hindi—not as a symbol of cultural hegemony but as a pliable medium through which to channel oral narratives, tribal philosophies,

ecological ethics, and collective memory. This practice aligns with what Homi Bhabha terms the "third space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 113), where the encounter between dominant and marginal cultures produces new, hybrid forms of identity and articulation. These hybridities are not diluted imitations but creative sites of resistance, where tradition converses with modernity in a language that is neither entirely native nor entirely foreign.

Yet, to valorise hybridity alone would be reductive. Many indigenous Hindi writers in Arunachal Pradesh also engage critically with the risks of modernity—particularly when it arrives as state-driven 'development.' Their narratives often expose the dislocation caused by infrastructural expansion, the commodification of land and labour, and the cultural alienation of the youth. These stories do not romanticise tradition but instead explore its potential to offer ethical alternatives to capitalist logic and bureaucratic rationalities. In Gomia Ete's short stories, for instance, rivers are not just sources of irrigation but entities imbued with ancestral memory and sacred temporality. Their damming, therefore, is not merely an environmental event but a cultural amputation (Ete, 2018).

It is within this fraught space that the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh makes its intervention. It critiques modernity not in a reactionary mode but through a decolonial re-imagining of community, time, and identity. At the same time, it resists the ossification of tradition into a monolithic, untouchable past. Rather, it reanimates traditional knowledge systems, rituals, and worldviews as living archives—archives capable of speaking back to modernity with both urgency and dignity.

The present study attempts to engage with this complex entanglement of tradition and modernity as represented in indigenous Hindi literary texts. Drawing upon postcolonial theorists such as Spivak, Bhabha, and Fanon, and contextualising the literature within the sociopolitical realities of Arunachal Pradesh, this paper contends that these narratives offer a unique template for indigenous resistance, linguistic hybridity, and epistemic decolonisation. They reframe tradition not as static heritage but as a dynamic, evolving force—capable of adapting without surrendering, resisting without isolation, and transforming without losing its soul.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism and the Indigenous Subject

To understand the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh through the prism of postcolonial studies is to acknowledge the complex historical legacies and cultural asymmetries that define the region's encounter with the modern Indian nation-state. Postcolonial theory

offers a robust critical apparatus to interrogate the tensions between tradition and modernity, marginality and centrality, orality and textuality, and voice and voicelessness. However, applying such a framework to Arunachal Pradesh necessitates contextual nuance, for the region's colonial experience was unlike the classical models of colonisation seen in mainland India. Rather than direct economic exploitation or settler occupation, the Northeast—and particularly Arunachal—was subjected to epistemic neglect, anthropological essentialism, and a systematic denial of political subjectivity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" becomes particularly resonant in this context. Spivak argues that the subaltern, positioned outside the circuits of hegemonic power and language, cannot be authentically represented within dominant epistemologies (Spivak, 1988, p. 271). In the case of Arunachal's tribal writers, the adoption of Hindi may appear as an act of assimilation into the dominant linguistic order. However, a closer reading reveals a strategic repositioning: the subaltern is not merely speaking in the master's tongue but is reshaping it to accommodate indigenous grammar, metaphors, and epistemes. The appropriation of Hindi becomes a nuanced gesture—simultaneously a mode of participation and a site of resistance.

This duality is further illuminated by Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space." In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contends that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a product of ongoing negotiation within a hybrid space of translation and difference (Bhabha, 1994, p. 113). For indigenous writers in Arunachal Pradesh, writing in Hindi opens up this third space where they can enunciate their experiences without being confined to either their tribal vernaculars or the homogenising assumptions of mainstream Hindi literature. It is a space of critical hybridity, where new subjectivities are forged through the interplay of the traditional and the modern, the native and the national.

Hybridity, however, should not be understood merely as a celebratory mingling of influences. Bhabha himself cautions that hybridity entails anxiety, ambivalence, and risk. In the case of Arunachali literature, the risk lies in cultural dilution and misrecognition—where indigenous voices, though visible, may still be misread through dominant tropes of exoticism, backwardness, or primitivism. Therefore, the task of postcolonial criticism is not to romanticise hybridity but to examine the power dynamics that structure it.

Another key theorist, Frantz Fanon, provides insight into the psychological dimensions of colonial subjugation and resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses how colonised

subjects often internalise feelings of inferiority, which manifest in mimicry, shame, or cultural abandonment (Fanon, 1963, p. 170). Although Arunachal Pradesh was not colonised in the classic sense, its tribes have long been subjected to epistemic violence—from being categorised as 'primitive' in colonial ethnographies to being excluded from mainstream educational, cultural, and media institutions in independent India. Literature thus becomes an emancipatory praxis—a means through which tribal writers assert the dignity of their heritage and reject the pathology of inferiority.

Postcolonial ecocriticism also offers a valuable entry point into the literary imaginaries of Arunachal's indigenous authors. Writers frequently foreground the interconnectedness of humans, animals, forests, and rivers—reflecting a worldview that radically contrasts with the anthropocentric assumptions of modernity. As scholars like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue, postcolonial ecocriticism challenges both imperial environmentalism and capitalist development models, privileging indigenous cosmologies that see the land not as property but as kin (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 5). This perspective allows for a more nuanced reading of literary works where natural elements are not symbolic backdrops but active participants in cultural meaning-making.

Additionally, Walter D. Mignolo's concept of "epistemic disobedience" is particularly relevant here. Mignolo suggests that coloniality survives through knowledge systems that marginalise non-Western ways of knowing. He advocates for "border thinking"—a decolonial praxis rooted in local histories and epistemologies (Mignolo, 2009, p. 163). When tribal writers in Arunachal Pradesh incorporate ritual chants, mythic structures, and seasonal rhythms into modern Hindi prose, they enact a form of epistemic disobedience. They refuse to write solely within the codes of metropolitan modernism and instead forge literary forms that are both rooted and radical.

The framework of indigenous postcoloniality also compels us to reconsider the role of orality in literary production. Many of the themes and structures within Arunachali Hindi literature are deeply indebted to oral traditions—be they folk songs, clan histories, or seasonal epics. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes, oral literature is not pre-literary but coeval with written culture; it contains its own modes of narrativity, temporality, and truth-claims (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 28). The interweaving of oral aesthetics into Hindi texts constitutes a form of literary sovereignty—asserting that modern writing need not forsake ancestral forms to be relevant.

Finally, the ethics of representation must also be addressed. Postcolonial theory warns against the ventriloquisation of the subaltern—that is, the tendency of elite or urban intellectuals to

"speak for" the marginalised. In this regard, indigenous Hindi writers from Arunachal Pradesh defy the paradigm of dependency. They are not being represented by others; they are representing themselves. Their literature is not a derivative account of tribal life, but an authoritative inscription of tribal worldviews in a modern literary register.

In sum, a postcolonial theoretical framework—inflected with insights from Spivak, Bhabha, Fanon, Ngũgĩ, Mignolo, and contemporary ecocriticism—provides a robust lens to examine the indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh. It allows us to see this literature not as an anomaly within Indian writing in Hindi, but as a vibrant, critical intervention that challenges received notions of tradition, modernity, language, and identity. The authors in question are not passive inheritors of culture; they are active re-creators of meaning, working at the intersections of history, resistance, and aesthetic innovation.

Literary Landscapes: Representing Tradition in Modern Forms

In indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh, tradition is often represented through folkloric devices—oral narratives, ancestral myths, tribal songs, and ritualised memory. Tani Talom's poem *"Bana Ka Raag"* invokes the primal relationship between the tribal self and the forest, portraying nature as animate, divine, and maternal. The motif of the forest here is not just ecological but ontological—a spatial metaphor for tribal beings (Talom, 2016).

Similarly, in Gomia Ete's short story *"Dhoru Gaon Ka Sapna"*, the tale of a young boy witnessing the transformation of his village under the banner of "development" exposes the epistemic violence of modernity. The construction of a hydro-electric dam is shown not merely as an economic shift but as a symbolic rupture—detaching the people from their rivers, gods, and stories (Ete, 2018).

These texts operate not in opposition to modernity per se, but against its uncritical imposition. They advocate for a relational modernity—one that acknowledges indigenous agency and cultural continuity.

Literary Landscapes: Representing Tradition in Modern Forms

In the indigenous Hindi literature emerging from Arunachal Pradesh, the notion of "tradition" is not a static inheritance but a dynamic force—interwoven with the lived experiences, ritual practices, and environmental consciousness of tribal communities. Rather than being relegated to the past, tradition is reanimated through literary devices that evoke the oral, the sacred, and the

communal. Writers from the region employ a repertoire of folkloric forms—ancestral myths, tribal songs, communal rituals, and memoryscapes—to assert the validity and vitality of indigenous epistemologies in the face of accelerating modernisation.

Tani Talom's widely regarded poem *Bana Ka Raag* serves as an evocative entry point into this discourse. The poem resounds with the echoes of a deeply ingrained tribal cosmology, wherein the forest is not merely a backdrop to human activity but a sentient, maternal entity. Talom does not anthropomorphise nature in a romantic sense; rather, he restores its ontological status as a being-within-being—alive, divine, and agentive. The term "raag" in the title resonates both musically and spiritually, signalling not only a tune but an elemental mood that binds the tribal subject with the wilderness in a relation of kinship and reverence. The forest, in this context, is a symbolic extension of the self, inseparable from the community's rituals, taboos, and oral histories (Talom, 2016). The poetics of the poem thus transcends aesthetic beauty and becomes a political act—asserting the forest as a sovereign space against the extractivist logic of developmentalism.

This sensibility is echoed, albeit in a different register, in Gomia Ete's poignant short story *Dhoru Gaon Ka Sapna*. The story traces the gradual transformation of a remote village through the eyes of a young boy, whose dreams of an idyllic future are soon clouded by the spectre of "development." The construction of a hydroelectric dam—framed as a mark of progress by external agents—ushers in not just environmental dislocation, but cultural disintegration. The sacred river, once a source of livelihood and legend, becomes a fenced-off zone of technical surveillance. Ete's narrative illuminates the deeper implications of such infrastructural projects, exposing what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak might term "epistemic violence"—a forceful imposition of modernist rationality that erases indigenous modes of knowing and being (Ete, 2018; Spivak, 1994).

Crucially, these literary texts do not reject modernity wholesale. They resist its uncritical importation into contexts where cultural frameworks remain radically different. This resistance is not nostalgic but dialogic. Both Talom and Ete advocate for what can be termed *relational modernity*—a vision of progress that engages with indigenous knowledge systems rather than overriding them. Such a vision underscores the importance of cultural continuity, where modern technologies and indigenous traditions co-exist in mutual respect rather than hierarchical antagonism.

This hybrid narrative strategy aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's theorisation of "cultural hybridity," where the interstitial space between coloniser and colonised becomes a site of negotiation rather than subordination (Bhabha, 1994). In the works of contemporary tribal writers from Arunachal Pradesh, this hybridity is manifested not through passive assimilation but through conscious refashioning. The narratives are deeply aware of their intertextuality with orality and their role in preserving endangered linguistic and ecological worlds.

Further examples strengthen this observation. For instance, in Duyu Penya's lyrical prose poem *Apne Aadmi Ki Yaad*, the lament of an elder remembering lost tribal rituals is juxtaposed against the advent of mobile towers and television sets. What emerges is not a linear tale of loss but a layered account of selective retention and reinvention. Traditional practices are not museumised but creatively repurposed. Penya draws on ancestral idioms while adapting his narrative for a contemporary readership. His work serves as a bridge between generations, acting as a literary morung—a space of intergenerational learning.

Similarly, in Loma Tado's *Chalo Gaon Laut Chalein*, the journey motif is inverted: the protagonist, a bureaucrat stationed in a metropolitan city, returns to his ancestral village not out of necessity but a longing for rootedness. The tale does not demonise the city, nor does it idealise the village. Instead, it draws attention to the subtle reconstitution of identity when one carries tribal memory into urban life. Tado's story is emblematic of what Arjun Appadurai describes as "the capacity to aspire" within the framework of cultural traditions (Appadurai, 2004). The protagonist's aspiration is not to escape the village but to reclaim it on his own terms.

Another notable trend in such literature is the prominence of gendered perspectives in preserving tradition. Women, often portrayed as custodians of ritual knowledge and oral lore, are given voice and agency. In Seno Moyong's*Nadi Ki Beti*, the central female character, Amoya, becomes a metaphorical river herself—fluid yet grounded. Her refusal to marry a settler-engineer symbolises a broader refusal to capitulate to modernity's allure without negotiation. Moyong's work brings to the fore the intersections of gender, ecology, and resistance—complicating the notion of tradition as patriarchal or regressive.

Moreover, the language of these texts itself becomes a site of resistance. By choosing to write in Hindi—albeit infused with tribal syntax, idioms, and proverbs—the authors challenge both the linguistic hegemony of dominant Hindi literature and the marginalisation of tribal tongues. This translational act is not a compromise but a strategy of visibility. It allows tribal stories to reach a wider audience while retaining their unique semantic texture. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has argued,

the politics of language is central to decolonising the mind (Ngũgĩ, 1986). The literature of Arunachal Pradesh's Hindi writers subtly enacts this decolonisation.

Lastly, these works are in active conversation with ecological thought. Whether depicting sacred groves, river deities, or agricultural festivals, they foreground an ethos of symbiosis. This ecological consciousness is not a modern addition but a cultural constant, resonant with the tribal worldview that sees no dichotomy between nature and culture. The forest, river, and sky are not resources to be exploited but relatives to be honoured. The literature thus becomes a vehicle for what Vandana Shiva calls "earth democracy"—a vision of participatory coexistence and ecological justice (Shiva, 2005).

In sum, indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh reclaims tradition not as a relic but as a reservoir of wisdom. Through nuanced portrayals of landscape, ritual, memory, and resistance, these texts challenge the teleology of modernity and offer alternative blueprints for progress. Writers like Talom, Ete, Penya, Tado, and Moyong illuminate the possibility of literary modernism that is not derivative but dialogic—rooted in place, yet open to the world. Their work invites us to rethink modernity as a plural, porous process, capable of accommodating the many ways of being that define India's tribal frontiers.

Gender, Land, and Cosmology

The intersectionality of gender, land, and cosmology in indigenous Hindi literature from Arunachal Pradesh opens a nuanced interpretive space, where tradition is neither passively inherited nor monolithically structured, but actively negotiated through complex, embodied experiences. The literary works emanating from this region do not view gender as a secondary social concern but treat it as intrinsic to the articulation of identity, memory, and ecology. In such representations, tribal women are neither silent figures nor archetypes; they are, rather, cultural interlocutors who transmit, question, and transform traditions through everyday acts of resilience, storytelling, and ritual participation.

Malini Tayeng's poem *Aai Ki Kahani* ("The Mother's Tale") emerges as a deeply evocative testimony to this layered role of the tribal woman. The mother figure in the poem is not merely a familial caretaker; she is cast as a guardian of the community's oral heritage and its ecological wisdom. Her tale is not framed within the binaries of public and private, or sacred and profane, but unfolds as a continuum where lullabies become legends, domestic routines morph into mythic enactments, and speech carries the weight of generational memory. Tayeng crafts the

mother as a mnemonic device—a living archive that carries in her voice the cartography of the tribe's cosmological and historical imagination (Tayeng, 2019).

However, the poem also subtly critiques the gendered exclusions entrenched in both traditional patriarchy and modern bureaucratic institutions. In one powerful stanza, the mother is seen weaving bamboo baskets—a symbolic act of nourishment and craftsmanship—only to be told by a local official that such work has "no economic value." Here, Tayeng exposes the epistemic gap between indigenous value systems and the commodified logic of modern governance. The traditional act of weaving is not simply artisanal; it encodes rituals, environmental knowledge, and gendered labour ethics that are rendered invisible by developmental discourses. The poem's quiet insistence on the mother's cultural labour offers a feminist intervention into how knowledge, land, and history are curated and controlled.

This feminist lens is further reinforced through the motif of resistance. While the mother transmits ancestral knowledge, she also subtly disrupts it. Her narratives are not mechanical recitations of inherited lore; they are interpolations, adaptations, and at times, rejections of customs that perpetuate gender hierarchies. In doing so, Tayeng offers a postcolonial feminist perspective reminiscent of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's assertion that "third-world women" are not passive victims but active agents shaping their own narratives within culturally specific contexts (Mohanty, 2003). The mother in *Aai Ki Kahani* is such an agent—both a custodian and a critic of tradition.

This gendered engagement with tradition also reveals itself in the terrain of tribal cosmology. Often rooted in cyclical time, animism, and seasonal attunement, indigenous cosmology presents a radical departure from the linear, extractionist temporality of capitalist modernity. In Soki Puro's acclaimed play *Ritu Chakra* ("Seasonal Cycle"), this dissonance becomes the central dramatic conflict. The play revolves around a young tribal man, Rana, who takes up a government job in the city, thereby disengaging from the seasonal rituals and agrarian duties of his village. Over time, his inability to align with the cycles of planting, harvesting, and communal festivals leads to a growing sense of psychological and spiritual alienation.

Puro deftly uses the device of the disrupted *ritu chakra* (seasonal cycle) as a metaphor for a broader ontological dislocation. The protagonist's severance from the land and its cosmological rhythm becomes a metaphor for the larger fracture experienced by indigenous communities as they are thrust into the machinery of modern statehood and capitalist labour. Time, in the tribal worldview, is not a commodity but a lived experience—marked by the monsoon's arrival, the

moon's waxing, the blooming of orchids, and the rituals performed in their honour. When Rana loses touch with this temporal system, he also loses his ontological bearings. His psychological breakdown is not individual but emblematic of a cultural trauma imposed by external models of life and work (Puro, 2020).

What is particularly compelling in *Ritu Chakra* is the way Puro connects the protagonist's inner fragmentation with a collective loss. The village elders, unable to perform rituals due to the absence of younger participants, lament the "dying songs" and "silenced drums." These are not sentimental laments but profound articulations of epistemicide—the death of knowledge systems. The play resonates with the warnings of scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who argue that modernity often commits "cognitive injustice" by privileging one form of knowing over others (Santos, 2007). In this context, tribal cosmology is not a mythic residue but an alternative epistemology—one that is cyclical, relational, and rooted in environmental harmony.

Land, in this literary landscape, is not abstract territory but sensuous geography. It holds memory, ritual, and affect. In both Tayeng's and Puro's texts, the land is feminised not in a reductive way but in a sacred, generative sense. The earth is addressed as *mata* (mother), not as property to be owned but as kin to be honoured. This worldview contests the extractivist ethos of modern land acquisition, where forests, rivers, and hills are reduced to economic metrics. Instead, the land in these writings is active—it listens, it mourns, it retaliates. The protagonist in *Ritu Chakra*, when he returns to his ancestral home, is haunted by dreams of a "weeping hill" and a "withered forest"—powerful images that embody the landscape's response to cultural abandonment.

The significance of gender in negotiating this ecological loss cannot be overstated. Women, especially in tribal societies, often serve as ritual specialists, herbal healers, and oral historians. Their roles are deeply tied to the cosmological understanding of time and land. The literary depiction of women as cosmological mediators reclaims their centrality in shaping not only cultural but environmental sustainability. In *Aai Ki Kahani*, the mother's stories begin and end with references to rain, seed, and soil. She becomes a human conduit through which land speaks.

These representations challenge Western ecofeminist binaries that too easily associate women with nature and men with culture. Instead, they offer a more layered indigenous feminism where both men and women are entangled in the cycles of the earth, albeit in gendered ways shaped by custom and cosmology. It is not enough, these texts seem to suggest, to acknowledge the

environmental crisis; one must also listen to the gendered voices who have lived in ecological intimacy for generations.

In conclusion, the intersection of gender, land, and cosmology in Arunachali Hindi literature presents a rich terrain for critical engagement. Through works like Tayeng's*Aai Ki Kahani* and Puro's *Ritu Chakra*, we see how tradition is not preserved in ossified form but reinterpreted through the lived experiences of women and men negotiating cultural change. These texts foreground indigenous epistemologies that challenge the epistemic violence of modern temporality and capitalist development, while asserting the indispensable role of women as narrators, stewards, and transformers of culture. In their hands, tradition becomes not a cage but a canvas—painted with memory, struggle, and cyclical hope.

Conclusion: Towards a Decolonial Literary Praxis

The indigenous Hindi literature of Arunachal Pradesh presents a rich, nuanced corpus that resists simplistic binaries of tradition versus modernity, past versus progress, or oral versus textual. Rather than conforming to pre-defined literary categories or paradigms, it forges a critical space of cultural negotiation—where indigenous knowledge systems, ritual practices, environmental ethics, and collective memory are re-asserted, re-interpreted, and re-inscribed through the act of storytelling. These texts speak not from the margins but from complex interstices, challenging dominant frameworks of literary modernity, nationhood, and epistemology.

Rather than retreating into a static traditionalism or embracing modernity in uncritical ways, the literature foregrounds the lived reality of tribal communities negotiating change while honouring their cultural roots. This is not a nostalgic return to a mythologised past, nor is it a linear narrative of assimilation into the globalised world. Instead, it is an ongoing, ethical, and aesthetic engagement with history, identity, and place. Whether through the voice of a mother weaving memory into bamboo in *Aai Ki Kahani*, or the psychic rupture experienced by an uprooted protagonist in *Ritu Chakra*, these narratives capture the texture of indigenous life-worlds as evolving, dialogic, and resilient.

Postcolonial theory undoubtedly provides valuable tools for interpreting such texts, especially through its critiques of colonial epistemology, representation, and subjectivity. Yet, as the literary works of Arunachal Pradesh demonstrate, postcolonial theory itself must be stretched and re-situated to account for the distinct ontologies and cosmologies of tribal societies. The

frameworks developed to analyse colonial relations in urban or elite contexts often overlook the unique historical trajectories and knowledge systems of indigenous communities. Here, Walter Mignolo's call for a "pluriversal" epistemology becomes particularly pertinent. Mignolo argues that rather than assuming a universal mode of knowledge or critique, we must attend to the "coexistence of multiple epistemologies"—each grounded in different histories, geographies, and cosmologies (Mignolo, 2009, p. 163).

Indeed, the literature discussed throughout this paper is not merely reflective of indigenous life; it is *generative*—it creates new ontologies, new idioms of agency, and new ways of relating to the land, the self, and the community. Through the hybrid use of Hindi interlaced with tribal idioms, the texts perform acts of linguistic resistance and cultural assertion. Through their cyclical narratives and gendered cosmologies, they offer alternatives to linear, extractivist models of development. Through their portrayal of ritual, memory, and landscape, they recuperate a relational mode of being that challenges the atomism of neoliberal modernity.

In this regard, these literary works enact a *decolonial literary praxis*—not only by resisting colonial residues but by building literary futures rooted in indigenous ethics and plural epistemologies. They affirm the dignity of tribal lives not as romanticised relics but as vital, ethical engagements with a fractured but possible world. Such a praxis calls upon readers, scholars, and institutions alike to de-centre the metropolitan canon and listen to the quiet, powerful voices emanating from the forested frontiers of the Indian literary landscape.

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Silence and Brown Womanhood: Diasporic Feminist Weaving and Heterogeneity in *The Direction of the Wind*

Kakoli Debnath[†] & Binda Sah[‡]

Abstract:

The paper examines Mansi Shah's novel, *The Direction of the Wind,* through an interdisciplinary lens, focusing on how Indian diasporic brown women negotiate fragmentation, silencing, and othering. The book resists the universalist feminist readings by revealing the heterogeneity of the diasporic experiences of brown women. By centering the mother-daughter duo, Nita and Sophie, and their transnational dislocation in Paris, Shah presents a quieter but radical mode of resilience- one that is grounded in self-discovery and emotional survivability rather than reactive confrontation. The study draws on Sadie Plant's concept of 'weaving' as a feminist cybermetaphor to frame these women's acts of rethreading diasporic identities and agency by employing qualitative methodology and textual analysis. The act of 'weaving', in this context, is not digital but metaphorical, representing a form of embodied knowledge that bridges fragmented identities and personal histories. Supplemented by theoretical engagement by Spivak and Mohanty, the paper emphasizes the importance of recognizing the complexities, multiplicity, and differences in Indian diasporic brown women's lives.

Keywords: brown women, heterogeneity, Indian diaspora, silence, weaving

Introduction

Mansi Shah's novel *The Direction of the Wind* navigates the spatial and emotional dislocations encountered by a mother-daughter duo, Nita and Sophie, whose lives span India and Paris. At the heart of the novel is Sophie's search to locate her mother, who had disappeared into Parisian life years earlier without Sophie's knowledge, leaving behind

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a legacy of fragmented identity, unanswered questions, and silences. Nita's life in Paris is marked by quiet isolation, exoticization of her brownness, and emotional estrangement as she grapples with her Indian identity amid the alienation of being the 'other' in Paris. Such an intimate journey becomes a prism through which Shah unearths layers of generational trauma, cultural rupture, and gendered silencing. Within the feminist context, Shah resists the simplification of brown women's transnational lives into monolithic narratives.

Diasporic experience, especially for women of colour, is often framed through the lenses of alienation, estrangement, fragmentation, and loss. However, *The Direction of the Wind* resists such homogenizing narratives by emphasizing the heterogeneity of brown women's lived experiences, making it irreducible to universalist readings. Nita and Sophie embody intersecting geographies, racialized perceptions, and personal desires, challenging the reductive lens of mainstream feminist diasporic discourses. Their emotional resilience is shaped through silence and fragmentation, defies victimhood, and emerges instead as a quiet radical assertion of agency, justifying the persistent resilience of the brown Indian diasporic women. Shah, thus, recenters the margin by foregrounding the narratives of the Global South.

The paper elucidates that Shah's protagonists engage in a metaphorical practice of 'weaving'- a subtle but powerful feminist gesture that entwines memory, reconnects fragmented identities, and creates a space of diasporic resilience. Weaving here is not overtly political or vocal; rather, it is an understated but subversive feminist act that resists the frameworks that often render brown women exotic or invisible. In such a practice of weaving, everyday life becomes a site of meaning-making and defiance. By engaging with Sadie Plant's cyberfeminist critiques from Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, this paper situates Shah's novel within a discourse that challenges the universalization of Third World women's experiences. Nita and Sophie emerge not as passive victims but as dynamic and evolving subjects who live, choose, and remember often quietly within and against the structures that seek to contain them. Their empowerment lies not in dramatic and reactive gestures but in their ability to live, question, remember, and quietly choose within and against the structures that seek to define them.

By adopting a qualitative methodology and textual analysis, the paper argues that *The Direction of the Wind* reimagines resilience as a sustained act of feminist survival and endurance for Indian diasporic brown women. In doing so, the paper foregrounds attention to the often overlooked delicate threads of resistance woven into the everyday experiences of transnational brown womanhood.

Review of Literature

Existing scholarship on diasporic women's identities has centered on marginalization, alienation, and loss. However, it has significantly expanded over the last two decades, although much of it still struggles to capture the contradictions, heterogeneity, and quieter forms of agency embedded in brown women's experience. Only a few have managed to address the quiet forms of resistance that arise from within fragmentation. Earlier feminist discourses have tended to universalize oppression and frame diasporic women through the lens of victimhood. However, contemporary feminists challenged such essentialism by foregrounding emotional labor, affect, creative resistance, and multiplicity.

Sadie Plant's *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture* (1997) is a foundational cyberfeminist text that directly challenges the essentialist concerns of gender by foregrounding fluidity and heterogeneity as "Species, sex, race, class: in those days none of this meant anything at all" (p. 3). Plant reframes women not as static biological subjects but as active matrices, codes, and interfaces within the technological system. By invoking metaphors as " webs of interacting blendings, leakings, mergings, weaving through ourselves" (p. 3), Plant (1997) reflects a feminist embrace of the complexity of rhizomatic being over binary structures. Among these, her metaphor of 'weaving' can transcend digital contexts where it becomes an essential symbol to map the nonlinear and intergenerational threads through which women resist dominant structures.

Spivak's seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988)raises critical questions on epistemic violence and critiques how Western intellectuals attempt to represent the voices of the marginalized, especially in colonized or formerly colonized nations. She critiques Western thinkers like Deleuze and Foucault and argues that "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak… the subaltern as female is more deeply in shadow…" (p. 28). Such interrogation of the Eurocentric values that universalize the female experiences and the heterogeneous realities of the subaltern women makes her work foundational to the critique of binary thinking.

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's chapter, "Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity" in their edited collection, *Scattered Hegemonies: Post Modernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (1994) makes a critical turning point in "problematizing theory; more specifically feminist theory" which tends to be "a homogenizing move by many First World women and men" (p. 2)towards "transnational cultural production and reception" (p. 2). The collection critiques the universalization of Western feminist values by foregrounding the

fluidity of women's experiences across geopolitical borders, class, and race. Sujata Moorti's *Color of Rape: Gender and Race in Television's Public Spheres* (2002) intervenes the dominant feminist discourses by demonstrating "how the categories of gender and race are represented in television images of sexual violence" (p. 3). She shows how media function as a regulatory regime that produces raced and gendered bodies through narratives of victimhood and criminality; thus her choice to examine rape narratives is "informed by feminist and critical race theories" (p. 5). This makes her work significant in illustrating resistance to hegemonic feminism through deconstruction and incorporation of intersectional analysis. Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (1997)attempts to "contest, criticize, and complicate some prevalent understandings" (p. ix) by challenging how Western feminist discourses frame nonwestern women, especially "the problematic roles assigned Indian women in attempts to "preserve Indian cultural identity" in immigrant communities" (p. xi). Narayan deconstructs how non-Western women are cast as victims of static traditions and positions the West women as liberated and progressive. This reinforces the colonial logic, marginalization, and the complicated lived realities of women in the Global South.

Theoretical Background

The paper builds on the metaphorical act of weaving to develop an interdisciplinary feminist framework that bridges cyberfeminist and postcolonial critiques, particularly around universalism and resilience. Sadie Plant's concept of 'weaving' is rooted in cyberfeminist theory and offers a powerful metaphor for reading the subtle, embodied agency of diasporic brown women. Plant reclaims a traditional feminized craft of weaving as a radical epistemological method within the emerging digital decentralized networks. - one that crisscrosses "the complex topical landscape" and cultivates the "twin goals of highlighting multifacetedness and establishing multiple connections" (Plant, 1997, p. 11). In this light, weaving is not a passive ornamental act but a recursive expression of agency. The loom becomes a site of resistance, where nonlinear rhythms defy the masculinist coded linearity of history, logic, and authorship. Plant emphasizes this when she notes that the process "doesn't just begin with writing; it is directly related rather to the weaving of elaborate figured silks" (p. 12). Meaning is generated not through hierarchy but through interlaced threads echoing hypertextuality as a feminist form of authorship "assembled into a 'woven interconnectedness' in which strength of connections derives from the partial overlapping of many threads of connectedness" (p. 11). This metaphor collapses the binaries of body vs technology, and emotion vs intellect that position weaving as a cyberfeminist convention, both subversive and generative. More than aesthetics, it encodes autonomy into the

fabric of subjectivity woven from affect, resistance, silence, and memory into new forms of feminist knowledge.

When extended to diasporic brown women, this metaphor illuminates how their identities, technologies, histories, and emotions are interwoven across cultures, borders, and timelines. Their fragmentation and silences are not singular and static voids but layered articulations, overlapping threads of migration, culture, and memory, where weaving becomes a feminist strategy for articulating marginality, resilience, and heterogeneity.

Although Plant's conceptual metaphor celebrates decentralized forms of knowledge must be situated alongside postcolonial critiques. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty caution against the universalizing tendencies embedded in feminist discourses that obscure the complexity of Global South women's lives. While Plant foregrounds multiplicity, Spivak provides a reminder that decentralization does not automatically resolve the problem of representation for marginalized women. Her observation that "the relationship between women and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class differences are substituted under that charge " (p. 28) challenges us to read silence as strategic and meaningful and not simply as erasure and absence. Similarly, Mohanty's (1988) critique of the construction of Third World women as a "singular, monolithic, subject" (p. 17) warns against reductive and universalized generalizations. Together, their ideas push against reductive representations and reorient our reading of agency towards everyday acts of resistance where diasporic brown women quietly weave memory, displacement, and survival into feminist knowledge that defies simplification.

Discussion

Weaving Silence and Subjectivity: Feminist Survivability in Diaspora

Central to this discussion is Sadie Plant's cyberfeminist notion of weaving- a metaphorical act tied to diasporic female agency, identity reconstruction, and a quiet subversion of patriarchy. In *The Direction of the Wind*, silence is not absence but resistance - a form of feminist survivability enacted through refusal, solitude, and aesthetics. Nita's transnational journey from India to Paris emphasizes a profound rejection of normative patriarchal expectations. Nita's decision to abandon motherhood and her role as a wife in India is not simply a disappearance but an intentional unravelling of a socially imposed identity. Her withdrawal from familial roles and immersion into the Parisian world of art metaphorically constructs a loom of resistance through which she began to weave a life rooted in survivability and artistic autonomy. Longing for a life

beyond India, Nita stares at her "tough navy-blue fabric" (Shah, 2023, p.10) suitcase that "contained little more than her paintbrushes, some family photographs, and clothing but was heavier than she had expected" (Shah, 2023, p. 11). Her decision to leave had burdened her for the "past eighteen months" or longer, "if she were being honest with herself"(Shah, 2023, p. 13), emphasizing the heartbreaking silence of abandoning her six-year-old daughter, Sophie. Nita's silence in the face of maternal expectation reflects a strategic reconstitution of selfhood through aesthetic expression.

Her final letter to her husband, Rajiv, before departure, signals a painful articulation of self after years of silent conformity: the "*more I try to force myself into my maternal and spousal duties and repress the life I dreamed of as a girl, the more the weight of that burden crushes me"* (Shah, 2023, p. 15). This confession reveals the internalized struggle she had long repressed, one she admits she was not "brave enough to say" (Shah, 2023, p. 14) to him in person. The letter, which is not a passive medium of expression and does not evoke silence in the literal sense, resists the often confrontational and visible resistance valorized within the Western feminist discourse. Her words, "*I need to become whole. To feel in control of my life for the first time*" (Shah, 2023, p. 15), reveal a moment of self-actualization in the wake of overwhelming emotional and cultural confinement. In this act of feminist assertion, Nita claims agency within structures that had historically rendered her silent and invisible. This is how Nita weaves a subjecthood in exile, composed of quiet rebellion, where, as Spivak (1988) remarks that the "relationship between women and silence can be plotted by themselves"(p. 28). Nita's silence becomes strategic as she navigates the intersecting forces of displacement and familial expectation, reclaiming autonomy through refusal. Her marginalized position renders her agency and pain largely unnoticed, but this silence is not submission- it is a feminist refusal of the form of expression imposed on her.

While Nita's silence in India emerges from familial oppression, it transforms in Paris into a method of self-preservation and protection in Paris into a mode of transnational resistance that refuses to be spoken for. Paris is not an easy terrain of liberation for Nita but a densely woven, complex tapestry of brown womanhood in which her silence becomes a form of everyday defiance. Her crafted invisibility resists overt confrontation and instead functions as a tool of survival in a white Eurocentric Parisian space. When she introduces herself to Dao as "an artist" (Shah, 2023, p. 28), she sheds her prior identities as a wife and mother that once tethered her life in India. Such self-representation emphasizes the beginning of a reweaving of identity through artistic authorship.

Nita's reticence to share her past with her white lover, Mathieu by responding only to "I was ready for a change" (Shah, 2023, p. 55) when asked if she misses her life in India, her only response, is emptied of any past detail, refuses to translate the trauma of departure into a palatable narrative. This refusal emphasizes a racialized boundary between her experience and articulation highlights how silence becomes a radical act of boundary setting. Thus, Nita's journey is laced with a profound sense of moral ambiguity- her departure ruptures Sophie's life; even the art she creates bears witness to the diasporic reality of her dislocation. Caught in a quandary where she weaves visibility in a "modeling job that paid considerably more than her sessions with Simon" (Shah 95)for French art class while simultaneously being erased as Sophie's mother. Her refusal to speak of Sophie, by addressing her as her niece, is a reaction to the gendered and racial precarity imposed on migrant women. In withholding the story, Nita defies the homogenizing tropes of the "composite, singular "Third World Woman" (Mohanty, 1984, pp. 334-335) - a figure Mohanty (1984) critiques as being a "singular, monolithic, subject" (Mohanty, 1984, p. 333) constructed by Western feminist narratives. By existing within the textures of her art, the shadows of the memory of her daughter, and letters from her husband, Nita resists being reduced to a victim. Although her narrative is marked by trauma, it does not conform to a Western feminist arc of liberation; rather, it embodies a refusal to adhere to the cultural and emotional expectations imposed on her brown gendered body. Through silence, pain, and solitude, Nita's weaving reflects an intimate map of feminist survivability rooted in multiplicity and difference.

Yet these silences carry consequences, for they are not without cost. As Nita attempts to repress memories of her marriage and Sophie, they often resurface through her art. She begins to "weave Sophie into her art" (Shah, 2023, p. 117), and her guilt bleeds into her canvas. Even Mathieu observes, "She haunts you, I can see" (Shah, 2023, p. 132), exposing how her aesthetic creation becomes an unintentional maternal archive. Her loom of silence and refusal to speak of Sophie, to articulate her pain and longing, is not a failure; rather, that the world she inhabits is untranslatable in the languages available to her. In turning to art, Nita wields silence and aesthetics as tools to encode memory, longing, and guilt into visual form. Such quiet defiance of Nita mirrors Plant's vision of weaving as a feminine-coded complex mode of rewriting subjectivity. Nita's life thus becomes a hypertextual tapestry- one that refuses fixed meanings and identities and instead reflects a fluid, shifting, and self-fashioned existence.

Stitching through Absence: Maternal Rupture and Feminist Reconciliation

Sophie's narrative offers a rethreading and a counter-narrative to Nita's, reframing absence not as abandonment but as an inherited wound and a starting point for charting a postcolonial feminist reweaving of her diasporic identity. If Nita enacts silence as a feminist refusal, Sophie responds by gathering the fragments left in that silence. Her diasporic journey is a simplistic retracing but a complex affective mapping of inheritance and dislocation. Growing up in India, Sophie internalizes her mother's absence as a form of emotional legacy. Her eventual arrival in Paris is a crossing of histories, borders, and ruptures, making her journey an act of feminist rethreading shaped by the mnemonic and affective weight of the unknown. She moves through Paris with an urgency born out of longing and scattered clues- addresses, photos, and traces of her mother's former life. As a result, Sophie's alienation is acute because she is in a foreign city where "no one looks like her", "dresses like her, and " no one speaks her languages" (Shah, 2023, p. 35), making her both invisible and hyper visible at the same time. The questions that swirled around in her mind- "She stayed here? For how long? Why did she leave?" (Shah, 2023, p. 68) are emotional knots she must unravel to understand her own fractured identity. Walking the same streets as Nita is a process of weaving, where Sophie rewrites the map, entangling her mother's past with her present to form a hybrid self.

Unlike Nita's aesthetic weaving, Sophie's weaving involves tracing her mother's life by navigating symbolic sites, such as Le Canard Volant, apartment in Marais, Bistro Laurent, and Simon's home in America. Each site holds a thread that Sophie pulls to reconstruct a lineage veiled in silence. Her process mirrors Plant's (1997) hypertextual model, where identity emerges through "the partial overlapping of many threads of connectedness" (p. 11) since Sophie's weaving is nonlinear and grounded in emotional inquiry, where she is not rescuing her mother from erasure but reclaiming meaning through affective labor.

Consequently, Sophie's journey becomes a site of postcolonial feminist healing. She does not seek restitution but an understanding of maternal pain, her confusion and desires, and the complex histories that tend to bind and separate them at the same time. Learning that Nita"could have been there for those milestones but opted not to be a part of them" (Shah, 2013, p. 139), propels her to ask questions about how one survives such loss. Sophie's attempt to know Nita is an act of recognition that, despite Nita's choices, she is not reduced to the trope of abandonment as a mother. In this light, Sophie enacts Mohanty's call for resisting the flattening of women from the Global South into monolithic victims and instead honors the messy and contradictory aspects of complex histories.

Unlike Nita, whose strategic silence in Paris functioned as an act of maternal erasure and partial identity, Sophie's silence also evolves strategically. Initially, she mirrors Nita's strategic withholding by concealing her maternal feelings to Cecile and others as a mode of protection in an unfamiliar terrain. But unlike Nita's maternal erasure, Sophie's silences are temporary spaces for gathering insight and building connections. Her emotional restraint allows her to navigate displacement and financial precarity while remaining focused on her search. Over time, these silences paved the way for dialogue s she builds familiarity and community with Cecile, Manoj, Naresh Uncle, and Dao. Eventually, Sophie gains the courage to speak, first to Dao, then to her fiancé, Kiran, and transforms silence into testimony. Her unfolding narrative resists linear progression and instead stitches a diasporic quilt from fragmented truths. Each emotional interaction and relationship in Paris- refuge at Taj Palace. Bonding with Cecile and a cathartic encounter with Dao serve as a node in Sophie's emotional cartography. Through these interactions, she reclaims intimacy in the face of loss and turns absence into presence. Her journey also echoes Spivak's assertion of women's silences being plotted by themselves and embodies Mohanty's intersectional feminist solidarity.

Both Nita and Sophie plot their silences on their terms, even in alienating geographies. While Spivak critiques how women's silences are often misread as voicelessness, Shah's narrative offers a counternarrative – silence here emerges as a deliberate and political act of reclamation rather than absence. Despite the temporal and spatial distance, what binds Nita and Sophie is their shared engagement in their acts of weaving. Nita's narrative is threaded in her aesthetic production and voluntary dislocation, while for Sophie, the rethreading occurs through transnational pursuit, emotional labor, and memory. Though their threads diverge across timelines and geography, their narratives converge in a diasporic tapestry of brown womanhood marked by silence, survival, and resistance. This is because Shah, as a diasporic writer herself, resists collapsing their stories into singular and reductive tropes of abandonment and reconciliation. Instead, she presents an evolving, decentralized form of feminist survivability that echoes Sadie Plant's vision of non-hierarchical, networked meaning-making.

In distinct and interrelated ways, both women challenge the ideological and cultural frameworks that attempt to contain them. Nita resists through absence - by leaving India, embracing solitude, and turning to art. In contrast, Sophie resists through remembrance by pursuing her mother's story and reassembling identity from fragments. Their resistance is heterogeneous, situated not only in their divergent choices but in how they navigate the intersecting structures of gender, race, and displacement. Mohanty cautions against the "process of homogenization and

systemization of the oppression of women in the third world" where the "power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourses" (Mohanty, 1984, p. 335) that imposes universal narratives of brown women. Saha's novel exemplifies this ethos by offering a nuanced portrait of brown diasporic womanhood and silence that is as political as it is personal.

Conclusion

Thus, in *The Direction of the Wind*, Mansi Shah crafts a poignant narrative that centers on the silences, complexities, and resistances of brown diasporic womanhood and defies simplistic categorization. Through the interwoven stories of Nita and Sophie, the novel articulates a feminist vision rooted in resilience, emotional survivability, and heterogeneous agency. Drawing on the conceptual metaphor of Plant's 'weaving', the characters' journeys illustrate how diasporic brown women rethread their fractured identities into subjectivities that are neither whole nor linear but deeply lived. The novel resonates with Spivak's critique of the politics of silence and Mohanty's call for contextual specificity, reminding us that brown women's lives cannot be flattened into a singular trajectory of expression or liberation. Instead, their lives unfold through layered acts of resistance where some are visible, while others are quiet defiance. Together, they are deeply political acts. In weaving their narratives, Nita and Sophie redefine the contours of diasporic feminist thought, resist erasure, and reclaim emotional agency. Thus, weaving emerges not only as a metaphor but also as a methodology, emphasizing an embodied feminist way of living, resisting, and narrating that honors the multiplicity, intergenerational difference, and the enduring political power of silence.

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Through the Lens of Heidegger's Philosophy: An Analysis of Camus's Meursault in terms of Heideggerian Thrownness, Fallenness, Anxiety and Authenticity

Tiyasha Saha[†]

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at Albert Camus's (in)famous character Meursault through the lens of Heideggerian philosophy, with a special emphasis on his concepts such as "thrownness", "anxiety", "fallenness", and "authenticity". Through a close textual analysis of Camus's *The Outsider* (also known as *The Stranger*), the study addresses a significant gap in the existing scholarship —especially within the Heideggerian readings of the text —that reads Meursault as either an apathetic person or an "authentic" *Dasein*. The present study departs from such interpretations by arguing that Meursault neither remains "inauthentic" nor completely succeeds in becoming "authentic", but gets suspended in his ontological liminality. His journey from "inauthenticity" to "authenticity" remains incomplete, maintaining an unresolved state of in-betweenness.

Keywords: Meursault, *Dasein*, authenticity, liminality.

Introduction

Despite Albert Camus's repeated insistence that he was not an existentialist, his (in)famous character, Meursault, has often been labelled an existential hero— one who recognises the inherent meaninglessness of the universe and rejects all social discourses to create his own meaning in life. Camus, however, preferred to call his protagonist an absurd hero— one who neither seeks to formulate meaning out of meaninglessness nor tries to escape the absurd. Existing research has furthered such discussions by reading Meursault's story through absurdist,

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existential, postcolonial, and feminist lenses. Some have concluded Meursault's condition as being a manifestation of pure apathy. Others have read Meursault through a Heideggerian lens, though without addressing his ontological liminality— a reading that renders him as neither apathetic nor "authentic" but a *Dasein* suspended in-between. Therefore, this paper examines Meursault through Heidegger's concepts of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*), "fallenness" (*Verfallen*), "anxiety" (*Angst*), and "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*) to establish that he embodies an ambiguous state where *Dasein* can neither remain "inauthentic" nor become fully "authentic". It is in this ambiguity and unresolved in-betweenness that his predicament lies.

Literature Review

Louis R. Rossi (1958) provides an early Heideggerian reading of Meursault's journey, arguing that his eventual acceptance of guilt and death helps him enact his freedom and achieve "authenticity". This paper departs from such an understanding by demonstrating that Meursault neither realizes his guilt nor takes any responsibility until the end of the text. Omar Khali (2021) takes a similar approach and arrives at the conclusion that Heideggerian anxiety often leads to apathy in individuals and results in undesired outcomes. Alba Amoia (1989/2001) also reads Meursault's understanding of absurdity in terms of apathy. She claims that Meursault accepts his verdict of death "without reaction or emotion, without anger or contrition" (p. 55) and ultimately allows "himself to be condemned to death through sheer apathy" (p. 60). However, to claim that Meursault accepts his death sentence without a reaction would be a fallacy. His desperation to escape the guillotine, his daydreams about new laws granting the condemned man a second chance, his constant fear of the guards coming for him at any time, and his ultimate outburst before the priest all suggest the opposite of a person without "reaction" and "emotion". Meursault's actions might appear indifferent, but he is anything but apathetic. He has a strong sexual urge, and his ultimate outburst reveals his ability to feel intensely. Again, Robert C. Solomon and Mary Gennuso regard his actions as symptomatic of emotional immaturity. Solomon (1978/2001) suggests that he "is a demonstration, even despite the author's intentions, of the poverty of consciousness. . ." (p. 64). Gennuso (2014) supports Solomon's reading and concludes, "Meursault does not gain much consciousness as a character" (p.254). However, claiming Meursault's existential predicament to be only a result of a stunted psychological growth not only denies its ontological implications but also infantilises him and reduces the gravity of his crime.

Dissenting views regarding Heidegger's adaptability to Camus

Now, it might be argued that reading Heidegger and Camus together poses a problem due to their fundamental differences —while Heidegger's primary domain was phenomenological ontology, Camus was more of a humanist (Feibleman, 1963), dealing with humans' experience with the absurd. Again, whereas Heidegger was a philosopher, Camus was a novelist who denied being a philosopher and captured his ideas in literary form (Sherman, 2009). Camus's explicit rejection of existentialism further distances him from the frameworks of Heidegger and Sartre. In an interview with Jeanine Delpech, Camus states, "I am not an existentialist. . . the only book of ideas that I have published, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers" (Camus, 1959/1967, p. 259). In that essay, he criticises existential thinkers' tendency to commit "philosophical suicide" (Camus, 1942/1975, p.32). Sherman writes, ". . . by Camus's lights, Heidegger also commits 'philosophical suicide,' for even if he begins from the concrete, he abstractly derives a transcendent meaning to which we ought to conform, which involves an 'authentic' comportment" (Sherman, 2009, p.42).

However, despite these differences, Camus and Heidegger can and should be read together because their ideas were products of the same period in history — a time ravaged by world wars and marked by a crisis of faith and anxiety. Heidegger was writing in the aftermath of WWI, while Camus's text appeared during WWII. Therefore, both were concerned with the same crisis that the mass destruction of life had generated throughout Europe. It is on this ground that a Heideggerian reading of *The Outsider* (also known as *The Stranger*)becomes relevant and powerful. Moreover, Camus (1942/1975) himself refers to Heideggerian "anxiety" in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He writes: "[E]verything begins with consciousness. . . 'anxiety,' as Heidegger says, is at the source of everything" (p.19). Thus, reading Camus's text through a Heideggerian lens not only helps to engage with the ontological implications of Meursault's situation but also continues the conversation Camus himself initiated.

Camus's Meursault through the lens of Heidegger's Philosophy

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's primary concern was the "question of Being" and how this Being —which he understands as *Dasein*— can progress from "inauthenticity" to "authenticity". According to Heidegger (1927/1962), *Dasein* ("Being-there") initially finds itself "thrown" into an already existing world that it has not chosen for itself. In order to make sense of that world, *Dasein* starts behaving in accordance with the normative discourse of the society— a situation he understands as "fallenness". In "fallenness", *Dasein* lives its life inauthentically, for its ideas and behaviours are shaped by *das Man* or "the They" of the society. We live on with this"inauthentic" life quite satisfactorily until we are faced with the mood of "anxiety", in which we are suddenly

brought before the absurd nakedness of our existence, and all our prefixed notions about our lives and the world lose their significance, forcing us to stand at the edge of the great void of existence. Heidegger (1927/1962) states, "Anxiety thus takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted" (p. 232). For him, this mood of "anxiety" opens *Dasein* to the possibility of attaining "authenticity". Since the world and all its discourses lose their meanings to *Dasein* at this stage, it starts noticing its own possibilities: anxiety"brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself" (p. 311). For Heidegger, this ultimate and inevitable possibility appears as death, an awareness of which can finally make *Dasein* free from the "everydayness" (*Alltäglichkeit*)—an "inauthentic" mode of existence in which "we take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge. . . as they judge. . .we find 'shocking' what they find shocking" (p. 164). Seen from this viewpoint, we can arrive at two conjectures about Camus's text: firstly, Meursault seems to embody *Dasein's* journey from "inauthenticity" to "authenticity", and secondly, characters like the judge, the prosecutor, the caretaker, the secretary, and the priest represent the "fallenness" of *das Man*.

To give a brief context of the plot first, the novella revolves around its central character, Meursault, an office clerk from Algiers, and his unfathomable disinterest in the courses of the world he inhabits. The novella starts with a shockingly passive tone of the protagonist: "My mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I received a telegram from the old people's home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. . .' That doesn't mean anything. It might have been yesterday" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 3). In the subsequent events that follow, we see Meursault visiting the old-age home, where almost everyone except him seems to mourn his mother's demise. He spends the night drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and eventually dozing off. What appears more shocking is that he refuses to even see his mother once. The next day, he goes to the beach and comes across his former co-worker, Marie, with whom he starts a casual relationship. Thus, the apparent emotional insensitivity with which Meursault deals with his mother's death establishes him as a character who does not function in accordance with what the normative social framework tells us to do. Society expects us to shed tears, mourn, and grieve at our loved ones' funerals. But that preconceived framework gets threatened when someone like Meursault comes up and decides to do exactly the opposite of what is expected of him: sleep, swim, go to the movies, and have sex with a former co-worker right after his mother's death. No wonder then, later in the text, he is condemned by the prosecutor and the society as "a moral monster" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 86).

The Outsider is divided into two parts: while the first part, focusing on the outside events, delineates the funeral of Meursault's mother and the events leading to his murder of the Arab, the second part focuses on Meursault's trial and takes us within his mind. When the second part opens, Meursault has already committed the heinous crime —he has already killed the brother of an Arab woman Raymond had been abusing. Ironically, during the trial, the prosecutors and judges (representatives of *das Man*) get more focused on examining Meursault's nonchalant attitude at his mother's funeral than the crime for which he was being held. The fact that he smoked and drank coffee at his mother's wake is brought to the fore as the workings of a criminal mind. The prosecutor even goes so far as to say, "I accuse this man of having buried his mother with the heartlessness of a criminal" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 87).

Significantly, after Meursault has been sentenced to death, we see an apparent transformation in him. While throughout the narrative, we hardly get any glimpse of his emotional state, after his verdict, Meursault seems to be eloquent with words —words that express his emotional condition. Initially, he desperately tries to think of ways in which he can escape the inevitable. Eventually, however, he not only realises the irrefutability of his fate but also accepts his imminent death with certainty. Therefore, when the novella ends, we find a Meursault who is not desperately trying to evade his death but is rather calm and at ease with his impending doom — he says, "I had been happy, and I was still happy" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 111).

In his essay "Novel of the Stranger" (in *Faux Pas*), Maurice Blanchot (1943/2001)talks about a flaw in the ending. In his opinion, Meursault deviates from his characteristics in the last pages of the book when he suddenly becomes too expressive (p. 221). However, it is Meursault's very articulation towards the end of the book that hints at his ultimate realisation of the fundamental truth of his life, which is death. Death is at the centre of Heidegger's philosophy, according to which the acceptance of one's own finitude makes*Dasein* "being-toward-death" (*Sein-zum-Tode*)— a fundamental key to *Dasein's*"authentic" existence, in which *Dasein* confronts its own mortality and embraces the fact that it is always on a journey towards its own death. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/1962) describes death as the "possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all" (p. 307). It is not just mere awareness of death but the realisation that we may die at any point in time and cease to exist altogether. Meursault attains this ultimate realisation only towards the end of the book when he is seen waiting for the Grim Reaper to knock at his door.

In order to understand Meursault's journey through the lens of Heidegger's philosophy, one first needs to understand the stages *Dasein* goes through before reaching the "authentic" realm of existence. Broadly speaking, the stages go like this: from "thrownness" to"fallenness"

to"anxiety" to "authenticity"."Anxiety" is the most crucial of these four stages because it is at this stage that *Dasein* goes through an epiphanic realisation of its own "fallenness", rejects the "everydayness" of life, and begins its journey towards "authenticity". From the beginning, Meursault emerges as a man who has already reached the stage of "anxiety" before the opening of the text. Heidegger's "anxiety" shall not be confused with general anxiety or fear. For Heidegger (1927/1962), it is the fundamental mood of Being that brings *Dasein* out of its "fallenness"—or, to quote J. M. Magrini (2006), it "provokes a shattering breakdown in the everyday, familiar ways in which *Dasein* conducts its life" (p.79). The idea is that once we reach the stage of "anxiety", the world and its normative discourses start appearing meaningless to us. This feeling of meaninglessness is central to Meursault's perception of the world. Throughout the novel, Meursault finds things to be meaningless, and his sole mantra seems to be that nothing matters. At this stage of "anxiety", the world has already lost its meaning to Meursault, who has realised that normative social discourses do not amount to anything. Therefore, when his girlfriend, Marie, asks him if he wants to marry her, he replies that "it was all the same to [him]" and that "it was of no importance whatsoever" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 38). When his boss offers him a job in Paris, his dry reply is, ". . . actually, I didn't care one way or the other" (Camus, 1942/2013, p.38). When asked by his boss if he is not interested in changing his life, he asserts, ". . . You can never really change your life and that, in any case, every life was more or less the same. . ." (Camus, 1942/2013, p.38). Later, when asked by the prosecutor if his mother's death has upset him, he replies, "I undoubtedly loved Mama very much, but that didn't mean anything" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 58).

Therefore, echoing Magrini (2006), it may be said about Meursault that "at the moment anxiety swells", *Dasein* (here Meursault) "no longer feels at home within the comfort and safety of its inauthentic 'being-in-the-world,' as the thoughts and interpretations of the 'they-self' lose meaning, force, and significance" (p. 79). The reason why Meursault does not mourn his mother's death, does not acknowledge the importance of marriage, and does not find the prospect of working in Paris exciting is because, in the mood of anxiety, he has realised his own "thrownness" and subsequent "fallenness" in the world— a view that has also been articulated by Khali (2021). This "thrownness" refers to the idea that we are born into a particular cultural, historical, and social context from which we cannot be extricated (Heidegger, 1927/1962). In *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide*, William Blattner (2006)simplifiesHeidegger's argument: "Our fundamental experience of the world is one of familiarity. . . our sense of identity . . . cannot be disentangled from the world around us"(p. 12).Heidegger (1927/1962)

terms this as "being-in-the-world" (*In-der-Welt-sein*), which emphasises *Dasein*'s familiarity with the world, suggesting that humans are always inherently embedded within it.

This involvement with the world often puts *Dasein*at the risk of "falling" into the "everydayness" of life. Heidegger states, "Falling reveals an essential ontological structure of *Dasein* itself . . . it constitutes all *Dasein*'s days in their everydayness" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 224). Interestingly, Meursault's "fallenness" is not portrayed to us in the book. The narrative starts at a moment when Meursault has already been afflicted with the mood of "anxiety". This is why when the book opens, Meursault seems to have a pretty good understanding of his own "thrownness" and "fallenness".It is true that he goes to work, visits the old age home after his mother's death, keeps Raymond company, and hangs out with Marie —but he does all of these while having an acute awareness of their meaninglessness. Therefore, whatever he does, he does with the knowledge that nothing matters. It can be assumed, therefore, that Meursault has passed the initial stage of his "fallenness" before the novella opens. This is not just mere speculation. Omar Khali (2021) provides an example from the text to show why he thinks that Meursault's disillusionment in the mood of "anxiety" happens during his earlier days. Meursault once tells us, "When I was a student, I was very ambitious about having a career. But when I had to give up my studies, I realized quite soon that none of that sort of thing mattered very much" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 38). It was at this moment when Meursault was confronted with "anxiety", which revealed to him in a moment of truth the nothingness and meaninglessness of human existence (Khali, 2021).

So far, we see that the mood of "anxiety" has revealed to Meursault his own "thrownness" and "fallenness". For Meursault, then, who has already attained the mood of "anxiety" before the beginning of the text, the next step that remains is to become "authentic". But how does one become "authentic"? As already discussed before, Heidegger (1927/1962) says that to be "authentic", one must first have the anagnorisis of his own "thrownness" and "fallenness". Meursault has already had this anagnorisis. The next step then is to embrace the "finitude" of his own existence ("being-toward-death"). This, too, we have briefly mentioned earlier. Having been afflicted with "anxiety", the "inauthentic" *Dasein* flees in the face of nothingness—his own death and finitude— but the "authentic" *Dasein* embraces it and starts taking responsibility for its own potential. Meursault also becomes "being-toward-death" after his verdict of death.

Meursault's "being-toward-death" is particularly evident in his confrontation with the priest. Initially, after being sentenced to death, Meursault thinks of ways in which he can "escape the inevitable"— "What I'm concerned about at present is how to avoid the guillotine. . .", he says

(Camus, 1942/2013, p. 98). From fantasising about getting his appeal passed to thinking of attending every execution if he gets to evade his doom, Meursault seems desperate to avoid death, which proves that he is yet to be "authentic". But when the priest (representing *das Man*) repeatedly tries to persuade Meursault to repent to God, Meursault gives in to a sudden outburst: he snaps at the priest, grabs him by his collar, and articulates his inner anguish, firmly stating, "I had very little time left and I didn't want to waste it on God" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 108). He further says:

> He seemed so sure of himself, didn't he? But not one of his certainties was worth a single strand of a woman's hair. He wasn't even sure he was alive because he lived life as if he were dead. . . but I was sure of myself, sure of everything, sure of my life, sure of my impending death (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 109).

This is the first time we see a glimpse of the "authentic" *Dasein* in Meursault. Not only does he accept his finitude and become "being-toward-death", but he also condemns the "fallenness" of the priest. Ingrid Fernandez (2014) rightly remarks, "What angers Meursault lies in the priest's frantic effort to ignore the world around him in search of abstract redemption" (p. 153). In other words, the priest's "fallenness" angers Meursault. In fact, besides the priest, characters like the judge and the prosecutor also represent Heidegger's "fallenness", and this becomes evident in the courtroom scene where almost everyone comes with the preconceived notion that not crying at one's mother's funeral makes one a criminal at heart.

Based on the argument developed till now, it might be tempting to conclude that, unlike those other "fallen" characters, Meursault successfully achieves "authenticity" because he embraces his own finitude towards the end. Rossi also believes that Meursault reaches "authenticity" through an eventual acceptance of guilt and death. He traces Meursault's final acknowledgement of his guilt to the assertion: ". . . for the first time, I realized I was guilty" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 81), and argues that it is "his first explicit confession of unqualified guilt" (Rossi, 1958, p. 409). What Rossi fails to realise, I believe, is that even if Meursault experiences a subtle sense of guilt — he repeatedly has the feeling of being judged — he neither actively acknowledges nor seriously reflects on his guilt. Even when he says that he realised he was guilty, the assertion reflects his realisation of being guilty in the eyes of the world, rather than a moment of personal epiphany. What Meursault actually says is, "I then felt some sort of indignation filling the courtroom and, for the first time, I realised I was guilty" (Camus, 1942/2013, p. 81). It is this "indignation" that makes him realise that society considers him guilty. At another point, he says, "I'd only been told I was guilty. I was guilty, I was paying for it, no one could ask any more of me" (Camus,

1942/2013, p.107). Clearly, the subtle unconscious guilt is never fully realised — nor deeply felt — by Meursault himself. Again, Rossi (1958) says, "Out of [Meursault's] anguish will come the final freedom in the face of death" (p. 408). While it is true that Meursault does become "being-toward-death" and achieve some degree of existential freedom towards the end, it would be problematic to declare that he fully achieves "authenticity" because he neither owns up to his mistakes nor ever takes responsibility for his actions.

Responsibility and self-awareness are two crucial factors for *Dasein's*"authenticity". Michael Watts(2014) writes that the "authentic" *Dasein* must always assume "full responsibility for its own life. . ." (p. 264). Rossi (1958) argues that by deciding to shoot the four shots after the first one and by choosing not to deny or repent for his crime, Meursault consciously enacts his freedom and takes responsibility: "[T]he four shots are fired by Meursault at the high noon of conscience. They are a re-enactment of the fatal first shot, an assumption of responsibility, a deliberate and 'free' choice of the self . . ." (p. 407). For Rossi, this assertion of freedom, coupled with his silence in the courtroom, represents Meursault taking responsibility for his action. Rossi writes

> Meursault shows his readiness to accept the consequence of his act when he makes a confession of his guilt by way of omission. The investigating magistrate asks him three times to explain why he had fired upon a prostrate body, and each time Meursault answers only with his silence . . .he does not deny the self he has chosen (p. 408).

In the footnote to the last sentence, he adds, "Meursault does not deny 'Christ' (his authentic self)" (p. 408). For Rossi, then, not denying his crime expresses his acknowledgement of his guilt and his determination to stand his ground — something that makes him "authentic". However, calling his act of violence a glimpse of the "authentic" self inevitably elevates his crime to a moment of heroism, completely overlooking the fact that the last four shots represent his cold-blooded murderous instinct, not his "authentic" self.

Taking responsibility requires self-awareness, not unnecessary violence. Meursault shows no self-awareness until the very end— it is only when he realises that he is going to die that he achieves some sort of awareness, but by that time, it is too late. Rossi (1958) reads the murder as an instance of Meursault taking responsibility. But being "authentic" does not mean rejecting the world and its people—Heidegger's very notion of *Dasein* is that it is always already embedded within the world and cannot be separated from it. Watts (2014) rightly points out that for Heidegger "living authentically is not an escape from our world. . . instead it is an involvement that arises from a deeper, more authentic understanding of life, which enables and inspires us to

make clear-sighted, determined choices from among the possibilities made available to us by our culture" (p. 86).

Murdering an unknown person definitely does not represent such a deeper understanding of life; it just exposes Meursault's failure to maintain one of the very fundamental conditions of*Dasein*as a "being-in-the-world"—"solicitude" (*Fürsorge*). "Solicitude" is a form of "care" (*Sorge*) that refers to *Dasein*'s state of "Being-with" (*Mitsein*), i.e., *Dasein*'s caring for others (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Here, we should refer to Frederick Olafson's assertion about "solicitude", which Watts (2014) mentions in his book. Olafson argues that Heidegger's concept of "solicitude" unmistakably upholds an ethical character. He says, "This is the concept of *Fursorge*— one human being's caring about another — and it is this caring that [Heidegger] declares to be . . . central to our being with one another" (p. 260). Now, for Heidegger, there are two modes of "solicitude": "inauthentic" and "authentic" (Watts, 2014). Whereas "inauthentic solicitude" annihilates others' individualities by making them dependent, "authentic solicitude" cares by helping them "take responsibility for their own lives" (Watts, 2014, p. 266).

For Heidegger (1927/1962), even when a *Dasein* becomes "authentic", it does not stop existing as a "being-in-the-world" (although in the mood of "anxiety" it cares the most about his existence as a "being-toward-death"). Therefore, Meursault's act of murder not only emerges as a sheer failure to take "care" of the other but is also a rejection of the world itself. Although *Dasein*'s freedom to choose oneself and one's own most possibility is a crucial aspect of being "authentic", this freedom comes with some limitations. In "Existentialism is a Humanism", Sartre (1946/2007) argues that since humans do not have a deterministic factor that defines their being, they are endowed with infinite freedom — "man is free, man is freedom" (p.29). But this freedom comes with a profound responsibility because our actions not merely define our essence but also affect and shape mankind at large. This is why Sartre argues, "I am therefore responsible for myself and for everyone else . . . In choosing myself, I choose man" (pp. 24-25). Meursault lacks this sense of responsibility throughout the text. Even on the verge of death, he never grasps the implications of his actions. Not for once does he show any sign of guilt for having killed the Arab, nor does he feel any sense of remorse for having helped Raymond abuse his Arab mistress. Thus, even if Meursault accepts his finitude, he never takes any responsibility for his actions; even if he becomes self-aware, his awareness is only halfway developed.

Conclusion

Therefore, proclaiming that Meursault achieves "authenticity" by the end of the text would be an error of judgement. Meursault, in the mood of "anxiety", indeed rejects his "fallenness" and makes certain progression towards being an "authentic" *Dasein*— his "being-toward-death" before his execution would definitely support this argument. But the very fact that he fails to develop a sense of responsibility for his actions acts as an antithesis to the previous argument. Meursault's journey from his "inauthentic" self to his "authentic" self, therefore, remains incomplete. He neither remains a fallen individual nor becomes an "authentic" *Dasein*. Trying to put Meursault in one category (either "inauthentic" or "authentic") would make us inevitably fall into the same trap that Camus has so vehemently criticised: the relentless reaching after meanings and certainties where none are to be found. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus (1942/1975) embraces the uncertainty of the absurd. His Sisyphus does not reach after formulating any meaning out of his meaningless task — instead, he embraces his condition and lives with it lucidly. Camus (1975) writes, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (p. 111). Similarly, his protagonist, too, occupies a central ambiguous state — he remains somewhere in-between. It is in this crepuscularity or liminality of his situation that the absurd seems to lie.

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A Study of War-Trauma in David Diop's Novel *At Night All Blood is Black*

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Abstract

Through close reading of *At Night All Blood is Black* - Anna Moschovakis' translation of David Diop's French novel *Frère d'âme*, this paper intends to critically engage with Diop's depiction of the psychological toll of the violence of war on Senegalese soldiers representing the imperial French army in WW1. French generals utilise the Senegalese tirailleurs' unmatched bravery, brute strength, unquestioning loyalty, and habit of mutilating the bodies of opponents to terrorise the Germans. But when, after witnessing the painful death of his "more than brother" Mademba in war, the narrator-protagonist Alfa determines to subvert his commanding officer's tactic of calculated calibration of African savagery, the result is a gradual loss of sanity, due to the combined effects of trauma and survivor guilt. Rather than depicting a simplistic heroic portrait, Diop puts emphasis on the vulnerability of the Senegalese youth, dragged into a European battle where he undergoes a trauma-induced transformation. The paper undertakes qualitative research in the form of textual criticism, employing a critical study of the novel to show how the novel addresses several aspects of trauma, madness, colonialism, and the history of colonial conscripts in WW1.

Keywords: Memory, Survivor guilt, Trauma, First World War, Tirailleurs Senegalais**.**

Introduction

David Diop (born 1966) is a French novelist as well as a professor of French at the University of Pau. His novel titled *Frère d'âme* (2018) won the Prix Goncourt des lycéens award in the year 2018. The French original was translated into English by Anna Moschovakis and published with the title *At Night All Blood is Black* in 2020. It won the International Booker Prize in 2021. Diop was born to a Senegalese father and a French mother. His maternal great-

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grandfather was a First World War veteran. However, he did not share much about his war experiences with his family members. In an interview, Diop stated that while reading letters written by French soldiers enlisted as infantrymen during the First World War, he came across poignant and emotional portrayals of life in the trenches. However, while studying letters written by the Senegalese riflemen better known as the 'tirailleurs senegalais', he only came across practical issues such as financial concerns. Diop wanted to delve into the psychological impact of the Great War on the African soldiers fighting for the French empire.

In the novel *At Night All Blood is Black*, Diop presents a stream-of-consciousness monologue by a young Senegalese man hailing from a village near Saint Louis. This man named Alfa Ndiyae, had enlisted in the tirailleurs senegalais together with his 'more-than-brother' Mademba Diop, to join the colonial French army in action at a European front against the German army. However, Mademba is killed in a gruesome manner by a wounded German soldier feigning death, who surprised and ripped open Mademba's abdomen with one slash of his bayonet. Alfa found Mademba lying bloodied, his guts leaking out through his gaping abdominal wound, writhing in indescribable pain. Mademba pleaded with Alfa thrice to slit his throat and relieve his pain. But Alfa out of humanity refused to kill his 'more than brother' in cold blood. Mademba thereafter slowly but gradually moves towards an agonising death. When Mademba finally succumbs, Alfa ties up the gaping wound with his own shirt and carries Mademba's dead body on his shoulder to the trench, in order to ensure that the martyred Mademba can be provided with a proper burial. His compatriots laud his bravery and sense of duty in the face of adversity and risk of death by enemy gunfire.

But this devastating loss of his 'more than friend' changes Alfa completely. As he himself says, he unlearnt the humanity that was implanted in his mind by his parents, family, community, and school. Having been freed from the shackles of morality and humanitarian ethics Alfa decides to avenge the death (by disembowelment at the hands of a German soldier feigning death on the battlefield) of his 'more-than-brother' Mademba Diop by crawling surreptitiously over to the no man's land, surprising and capturing unsuspecting, blue-eyed German soldiers one at a time, slitting open the backs of their knees, tying and gagging them, before disembowelling them- every time the whistle for an attack is sounded. When the German soldier, writhing in pain begs Alfa to end his suffering, Alfa slits his throat. Once the German soldier has perished, he neatly cuts off the soldier's hand and brings it (with the rifle it held) back to the trench.

His comrades - both black and white, congratulate and celebrate his feats, offer him food and tobacco. They also help him clean himself. This continues till the third hand. When he brings

back his fourth hand, he notices the reaction of his comrades change abruptly-they do not come near him. He realises that the smiles with which they are greeting him are false smiles. Alfa also notices that they are carefully avoiding any contact with his utensils as well as other goods. They avoid either attracting his attention or earning his ire because the rumor that he is a soldier-sorcerer feeding on the insides of soldiers-enemy or comrade, begins gaining traction. Even so, whenever Colonel Armand whistles for attack, he goes out to battle, but returns hours after the retreat whistle has been sounded, bringing back more severed hands as grotesque trophies of war. He preserves following the technique used that Gandiol fisherfolk traditionally follow to preserve dried fish.

When he has seven severed hands, Colonel Armand informs him of his decision to send Alfa for a month's rest to the rear, apparently considering his exertion. At the rehabilitation centre, his stream-of-consciousness monologue informs us as though he is recuperating from the traumatic effects of war under the empathetic treatment and care offered by Dr. Francois and his daughter- nurseMademoiselle Francois. However, in the penultimate chapter, we find that his mental sanity completely deserts him, when in a deeply disorienting monologue he informs that he has raped and murdered Mademoiselle Francois. In the final chapter, the psychological integrity of Alfa undergoes further deterioration, as his voice merges with that of his 'more-than-brother' Mademba Diop.

The Tirailleurs Senegalais: History

To address the crisis in military recruitment, Governor Louis Faidherbe of Senegal in 1857 created the first permanent units of black African soldiers and named them 'Tirailleurs Senegalais'-a volunteer professional army that attracted recruits by combining material and ideological incentives, notably the promise of taking spoils of war (Echenberg, 1991, p. 15). Towards the end of the 19th century, when slavery had been abolished, thereby making the 'rachat' (Echenberg, 1991, p. 17) system untenable, Tirailleurs were recruited chiefly through a combination of three methods - paying enlistment bonus to the former slave masters, incorporating prisoners-of-war and porters, and as career-choice.

At the beginning of the 20th century, when imperial France felt the need to sharply increase the size of its military, to fight wars not only in the colonies but in Europe as well, voices demanding the amalgamation of coloured races in the French army began gaining momentum. Most prominent among them was General Charles Mangin, who in his 1910 book *La Force Noire* (meaning the Black Force) advocated the quick and massive use of colonial troops, in the event

of a war in Europe. Mangin might have imbibed the idea from French diplomat, Orientalist cum novelist Eugene Melchior de Vogue, who believed that the French empire was in decline and must be revitalised through the employment of vigorous troops from the African colonies of France-an idea that he elaborated in his 1899 novel *Les Morts qui parlent* (Echenberg, 1991, p. 28).

Mangin identified French West Africa as France's prospective reservoir for the recruitment of soldiers to bolster its army, hailing the male youth of this area as born soldiers, who were yet unspoiled by the difficult work of farm or factory, unlike their European counterparts. Besides, Mangin pointed out that African races possessed a less-developed nervous system that made them more immune to pain sensation (Echenberg, 1991, p. 29).

European Stereotypes about African People

A connected idea is that of the African as 'grand enfant' or big child. Europeans propagated the idea that Africans were simple, innocent, and gullible as compared to Europeans. Contemporary European popular culture was flooded with imagery that portrayed Africans as childish, gentle, and warm-hearted. Such images reinforced stereotypes of inferiority and stressed the need for enlightened guidance, besides justifying the disregard towards Africans' mental capacities shown by their white superiors. African soldiers' ethic of hard work, dogged determination, and unquestioning loyalty to their masters were encompassed under the image of the grand enfant (Branach-Kallas, 2021, p. 5).

Another unrelated and almost antithetical idea was the concept of Africans being 'demon noire', i.e.-black demons, who disregarded their own lives on the battlefield and cruelly mutilated their enemies, flouting European conventions of war (Branach-Kallas 5). It was this gory image of French West African soldiers savagely hacking their enemies on the battlefield, which the French army propagated, especially when fighting against other European colonial armies such as the Germans (Branach-Kallas, 2021, p. 5). Stereotypes of savagery and violence were utilised to strike terror in the minds of military opponents (Branach-Kallas, 2021, p. 4). The strategy was put to use in the colonial wars of conquest, as well as the First World War (Echenberg, 1991,p. 32).

Survivor Guilt and Trauma

Alfa Ndiyae begins the narrative in retrospect; Mademba Diop had been eviscerated by a German soldier pretending to be dead on the battlefield. Mademba died a slow and painful death, entreating the narrator Alfa to slit his throat and relieve him from the pain. Alfa, deeming

it inhuman, could not commit the act and had to watch his 'more than brother' slowly succumb to a long and agonising death. Looking back at this slow and painful process, Alfa holds himself responsible for prolonging Mademba's agony. He thinks that it would have been more humane to have killed Mademba upon his first request, thus relieving him of the agony. Moreover, he blames himself for the fact that on the fateful day, Mademba charged out of the trenches upon Colonel Armand's sounding the whistle for an attack, precisely because Alfa had taunted Mademba and his clan for having the proud peacock as a totem (Diop, 2020, p. 28). Alfa comes to the realization that Mademba had been pushed to the point of proving himself as a brave warrior, especially after the taunts of Alfa; sadly, he died a gruesome death the same day.

Alfa says that he has allowed himself to think and ponder over things, which he would not even have dared to, before his world and value-system were completely reduced to topsy-turvy by the painful death of his 'more-than-brother' (Diop, 2020, p. 8). Once Mademba breathes his last, Alfa gathers Mademba's guts spread out on the ground and ties him up with his shirt, and then carries him on his shoulders to the trench, in full view of the enemy. This act of heroism and camaraderie earns him the 'croix-de-guerre' (Diop, 2020, p. 12). But Alfa is so deep in trauma that the award means nothing to him, probably he does not even realize it at the moment. The brutal event of war gets condensed into the scene of Mademba's death and returns to Alfa continuously, in the form of a flashback. This "image of ultimate horror" (Lifton, 1996, p. 142) constitutes the core of his survivor guilt and endows him with a sense of mission, as is common with survivors of trauma (Herman, 1992, p. 41). ConsequentlyAlfa plunges into a spree of disembowelling blue-eyed German soldiers. As these enemy soldiers lie writhing in pain, they request Alfa to put an end to their misery and Alfa obliges, believing it an act of atonement, for his previous inability to do so in the case of his "more than brother". His frenzied imagination finds in this repetitive activity a just repayment of his "permanent and unpayable" debt to the dead (Lifton, 1996,p.145). Through the abundant portrayal of "dismembered and pulverized bodies" Diop "creates a macabre poetics of excess" (Branach-Kallas, 2021,p. 6) reflecting Alfa's profound trauma and his unwitting re-enactment of the stereotypes associated with savagery.

Playing the Savage

Notwithstanding the impact that the scene of Mademba's brutal death has on Alfa, it must be understood that his trauma also stems from the othering of African soldiers by their French superiors on the battlefield. Drawing on General Mangin's theories, Captain Armand hails the 'Chocolat soldiers' as a "force of nature" (Diop, 2020, p. 17)- a fact that has purportedly terrorized the enemy German camp. Utilising the enthusiasm among the African soldiers upon

hearing this, which is visible from their facial expressions, Captain Armand reassures them that France takes note and remains ever-indebted to the African soldiers for their unwavering commitment to the war effort (Diop, 2020, p. 14). Whereas African savagery was used on the one hand to justify the European colonisation of Africa and its civilising mission, a calibrated use of the same was celebrated by the French military captain. Alfa notes that this reassurance imbues his comrades with enthusiasm. Whenever Captain Armand sounds the whistle to attack, they "sprint on to the battlefield to be beautifully massacred while screaming like madmen, regulation rifle in the left hand and savage machete in the right" (Diop, 2020, p. 14).

But Alfa is unwilling to allow Captain Armand in particular and France in general to domesticate his potential for savagery, unlike his fellow African soldiers. Therefore, on Captain Armand's sounding of the whistle for attack, he rushes out to battle like his comrades, but unlike them, he does not return even after the whistle for retreat is sounded. On the contrary, his real battle begins after the retreat; he stealthily attacks, disembowels, kills, and maims an unsuspecting German soldier every time, returning with his severed hand. Initially, Alfa's French Captain as well as his African comrades celebrate his heroics. But soon, his comrades begin expressing their fear of him, believing him to be a soldier-sorcerer, a 'demm'. Captain Armand, while announcing his decision to send Alfa for a month's rest and recuperation, states that Alfa's actions defy "the civilities of war" (Diop, 2020, p. 75).

Alfa shows remarkable maturity in seeing through the manipulative colonial tactics that label African soldiers as 'grand enfant'. His decision to abstain from playing the savage at Captain Armand's will is clearly an appropriation of colonial ideology, while resisting absorption in the same (Ashcroft, 2001, p.126). But by brutally killing and mutilating blue-eyed German soldiers, Alfa positions himself in the same stereotype, which is why not only the African comrades but also Captain Armand celebrates Alfa's early heroics.

But as Alfa keeps flouting Captain Armand's retreat signals, staying back to disembowel, kill, and maim more German soldiers, the African Alfa's savage instinct goes out of European Armand's control. Thus, the same Armand who had been happy to employ controlled savagery of his African soldiers against the Germans, decides to lay off Alfa from front duty citing his actions as breaching the code of "civilities of war"(Diop, 2020, p. 75). By transgressing the colonial expectation of savagery and choosing to play the savage at his own will, Alfa questions European civilisation and reveals its fallacy. However, the trauma that lay at the heart of this wilful role-play, brought about in the wake of a European war that expends African soldiers as cannon

fodder, is so profoundly traumatic that he cannot come out of its clutches. On the contrary, he sinks irretrievably into its mire and completely loses his sanity.

Being Identified as the 'Demm'

The 'demm' or soldier-sorcerer refers to a "witch, sorcerer, or mysterious human" (Kilroy-Marac, 2019, pp. 77-79) who feeds on human souls or their vital energies. Trauma survivors, suffering from extreme depersonalisation, might face ostracization from society, feeling that they are treated as "monstrous, undesirable, and untouchable" by others.(Branach-Kallas, 2021, p. 9). In African culture, this translates into one's identification with the 'demm'. However, Alfa himself finds the actions of Captain Armand worthy of drawing a comparison with the figure of the 'demm': "The captain is a devourer of souls. I know, I understand that captain Armand was a dëmm who needed his wife, war, to survive, just the way she needed a husband like him to support her" (Diop, 2020, p. 75).

Conclusion

It must be stated that through the portrayal of his protagonist Alfa Ndiyae, Diop clearly refutes both the opposing claims regarding the African-he is neither the 'grand enfant' nor the 'demon noire'. The European Armand who chalks out the boundaries of civility to the supposedly savage Alfa, is able to quell a mutiny in his regiment by offering the mutineers as cannon fodder. But the purported savage Alfa could not bring himself to finish off his more than brother when the latter was writhing in pain - which proves Alfa's innate humanity. Alfa questions the foundational fallacy behind this logic which allows one to execute one's own soldiers mercilessly, whereas mutilating opponent soldiers makes it an act of barbarism outside the realm of civility. Clearly, at this point, it seems that Alfa is able to raise this question because of his deeply rooted understanding of humanity and civilisation. His decision to defy Captain Armand's orders and play the savage at his own will is proof of the same. But the very same action jeopardises his status and puts him back in the category of savage, by the no-less barbaric European Captain.

Diop avoids falling prey to another significant dichotomy-that of the good colonised vis-à-vis the bad coloniser. The actions of Alfa at the rehabilitation centre-namely the act of raping and strangulating to death the nurse Mademoiselle Francois under the delusion that she sexually desires him proves beyond a doubt how war has completely made a savage out of him, suppressing or erasing the humane qualities innate in him.

Diop's novel stands as an indictment of war itself, by poignantly portraying the complex transformation of a lively, sensitive African youth into a mindless agent and simultaneously victim of war, on whom deep-rooted trauma leaves behind an indelible imprint.

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Self-Discovery, Spiritual Enlightenment and Their Contemporary Relevance: A Study of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*

S. Suwathiga[‡] & S. Bhuvaneswari[§]

Abstract

The journey of the two protagonists in the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse showcases their paths to self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. The protagonist Santiago's quest in *The Alchemist* is driven by his dreams and the search for material treasure, while Siddhartha's journey in *Siddhartha* focuses on self-enlightenment through life lessons and the rejection of external teachings. This paper compares the journeys of both Santiago and Siddhartha, focusing on the role of dreams, guidance, and personal growth in the transformation they undergo. By using Freud and Jung's psychological theories, as well as Campbell and Frankl's philosophical ideas, this paper explores a common theme of following one's path, self-actualization, and the integration of the unconscious. Additionally, both novels focus on the significance of the personal journey towards self-discovery, depicting that true fulfilment is not found in the outside world but within oneself. The journeys of the two protagonists show us the transformative power of their inner growth, as both characters learn to believe in their instincts, overcome struggles, and discover the deeper purpose of their lives. Furthermore, the paper applies a multidisciplinary lens, linking literary exploration with modern real-life applications to highlight the timeless relevance of these themes. Through a comparative framework, this study offers new insights into how inner transformation and meaning-making remain vital in both literature and contemporary life.

Keywords: Self-discovery, Personal Growth, Transformation, Dreams.

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Introduction

The two novels, Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* explore the universal theme of self-discovery. In both stories, the protagonists undergo transformative journeys that are both outward and inward in nature. Santiago's journey is driven by the search for material treasure, while Siddhartha's path focuses on achieving enlightenment through spiritual growth. Despite these differences, both novels emphasize the importance of following one's inner voice, embracing personal growth, and understanding the true nature of life's existence. This paper will compare the two protagonistsSantiago and Siddharthain terms of their motivations, the role of dreams and mentors, and the ultimate realization of their true selves. By analysing the common themes and psychological motives of both novels, we will gain insight into how each character's journey reflects life principles of self-realization and spiritual awakening.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature, relying on textual analysis and supported by interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology and philosophy. The framework includes Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's dream and unconscious theories, Joseph Campbell's monomyth, and Viktor Frankl's existential psychology. By juxtaposing the narratives of The Alchemist and Siddhartha, the paper identifies symbolic parallels, differences in spiritual quests, and their reflections in real-world examples to provide both textual and practical relevance.

Freudian and Jungian Dream Theories

The theory of dreams by Sigmund Freud and the concept of the unconscious by Carl Jung help in analysing the experiences of the protagonists in both novels. Freud (1900) proposed that dreams are manifestations of repressed desires and unconscious wishes. In the novel *The Alchemist*, Santiago's recurring dream of a treasure hidden in Egypt can be seen through a Freudian lens as a symbol of his repressed desire for a more fulfilling life. The dream serves as a catalyst, pushing him to leave his existing world and embark on a transformative journey.

From the perspective of Jung, Santiago's dream represents the call to adventure archetype, as described by Joseph Campbell (1949) in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Santiago's journey mirrors the stages of Campbell's hero's journey, which includes a call to adventure, a series of trials, and ultimately the realization of the self. Jung's (1961) theory of individuation, the process by which an individual unifies the conscious and unconscious parts of the self, is mirrored in the journey

of Santiago. As Santiago progresses on his quest, he faces challenges that force him to confront his unconscious desires and fears, ultimately leading to self-actualization.

Siddhartha's journey, though not primarily driven by dreams, can also be analyzed using Jung's theories. Siddhartha seeks enlightenment through direct experience, shedding external teachings and relying on his own inner wisdom. According to Jung (1964), the search for self-knowledge involves confronting and integrating the unconscious, a process Siddhartha undergoes as he moves away from traditional teachings to discover his own truth.

Santiago and Siddhartha: Journeys of Self-Discovery

Santiago's journey is set in motion by his frequent dreams about a treasure hidden in Egypt. This dream is not just a spiritual vision; it represents Santiago's unconscious desires, forcing him to focus on something greater than his life as a shepherd. Freud (1900) would see Santiago's dream as a form of wish fulfilment, where the unconscious mind expresses repressed desires for adventure and fulfilment. The treasure that Santiago visualizes in his dream symbolizes the realization of personal legend, or his true purpose in life, which he should pursue to achieve self-actualization.

From the Jungian perspective, Santiago's dream represents the archetype of the call to adventure, a central element of the hero's journey. According to Campbell (1949), this archetype marks the beginning of a transformative process in which the hero leaves the ordinary world and enters the unknown world. In the journey of Santiago, he confronts both external obstacles and his internal fears. As he seeks guidance from mentors like the old king and the alchemist, Santiago learns to interpret signs and omens, which help him connect with his inner wisdom.

Santiago's thirst for self-discovery mirrors Jung's concept of individuation, the process of integrating the conscious and unconscious parts of the self. As Santiago follows his dream, he must confront different aspects of his psyche, including his fear and desires. Ultimately, Santiago discovers that the treasure he finds is not a material object, but a deeper understanding of his own self and his connection to the world.

In comparison to Santiago's dream-driven journey, Siddhartha's thirst for self-discovery in the novel is guided by direct experience and introspection. Siddhartha begins his journey as a young man seeking spiritual enlightenment by rejecting the teachings of his father and other spiritual teachers. Unlike Santiago, Siddhartha is not prompted by a dream to take action; instead, he sets out on a journey to find the solution to life's existential questions.

Siddhartha's journey embodies Viktor Frankl's (2006) belief that the pursuit of meaning lies at the heart of human life. In Man's Search for Meaning, Frankl emphasizes that each person must discover their own purpose, as this search brings a deep sense of fulfillment. Siddhartha's path reflects this notion. He realizes that genuine enlightenment isn't found through others' teachings or material wealth but through personal insight. As he navigates experiences of luxury, desire, and spiritual discipline, he comes to understand the value of inner peace and the deep connection between all living things.

The Role of Mentors: Comparing the Alchemist and Siddhartha's Teachers

Both Santiago and Siddhartha meet mentors who play pivotal roles in their respective personal journeys, though the type of guidance they receive varies. In The Alchemist, the Alchemist becomes Santiago's final and most influential mentor, helping him grasp the spiritual truths of the world. He represents the Wise Old Man archetype, offering insight, clarity, and direction. Under his mentorship, Santiago learns to read the signs of the universe and follow his Personal Legend.

Likewise, in Siddhartha, the protagonist is influenced by several figures, such as the Buddha and Kamala, who each impart different life lessons. However, Siddhartha's path stands out because he eventually turns away from their teachings, choosing instead to discover truth through his own experience. This rejection of external doctrines in favour of inner realization underscores the idea that true understanding must come from within.

While both novels underscore the value of mentors in the journey of self-discovery, they ultimately suggest that the greatest teacher lies within oneself. Although others can illuminate the path, it is by trusting their own inner voice that both Santiago and Siddhartha find their true purpose.

Dreams, Destiny, and the Journey Toward Self-Realization

The protagonists of both The Alchemist and Siddhartha are guided by an inner calling, reflecting Carl Jung's (1961) concept of the inner Self. Santiago's dreams and Siddhartha's spiritual pursuit symbolize their individual paths toward self-realization. Each character longs for something beyond the material world, and through their journeys, they come to recognize that true fulfillment arises from uniting the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self.

In The Alchemist, Santiago's dream sparks a physical quest, pushing him into the world in search of treasure. In contrast, Siddhartha charts an inward journey, one rooted in personal growth and the pursuit of enlightenment. Despite these differences, both characters must learn to trust their inner voice and stay true to their unique paths. As Viktor Frankl (2006) argues, the pursuit of meaning is inherently personal; Santiago and Siddhartha each exemplify this truth through the choices they make and the wisdom they gain.

The Power of Self-Reliance: Real-Life Inspirations and Modern Applications

Both The Alchemist and Siddhartha offer enduring insights into the power of following one's inner path. Though Santiago's search for treasure and Siddhartha's spiritual quest take place in different cultural and narrative contexts, they share a central message: fulfillment is not found in external achievements, but through self-reliance and the pursuit of personal meaning. In today's world, often shaped by social expectations and external validation, the journeys of these two characters serve as powerful reminders that true growth and purpose come from within.

The Philosophy of Self-Reliance in a Modern Context

Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance (1841) champions the idea of trusting one's inner voice, rejecting conformity, and living authentically. This philosophy remains strikingly relevant today, especially in the lives of individuals who break away from conventional norms to follow their own visions. One such example is Elon Musk, the visionary behind Tesla and SpaceX. Musk's pursuit of space exploration and sustainable technology exemplifies Emerson's call for individualism and inner conviction.

Musk's journey was far from smooth—facing early setbacks, public doubt, and near-financial collapse. Yet, his commitment to his beliefs and long-term vision propelled him forward. His experience closely parallels Santiago's pursuit of his "Personal Legend," where faith in oneself and perseverance through adversity are key. Like Santiago, Musk trusted his instincts, followed his inner compass, and ultimately turned an improbable dream into reality. His story embodies the same core lesson found in both The Alchemist and Siddhartha: when one listens to their inner calling and remains true to it, the universe aligns to support their journey.

The Role of Dreams in Personal Growth

Dreams, both literal and metaphorical, play a crucial role in shaping the future. In The Alchemist, Santiago's dream acts as a direct catalyst for his journey, guiding him toward his

destiny. In the real world, dreams often manifest as ambitions, goals, or desires that drive individuals to strive for something greater. A 2023 study by Psychology Today examined the impact of visualization and goal-setting on achieving personal success. The research found that individuals who clearly define their goals and consistently visualize their success are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes, as these practices help them stay focused and motivated.

This mirrors the experiences of both Santiago and Siddhartha. Santiago's dream of treasure propels him on a quest to fulfill his Personal Legend, while Siddhartha's inner yearning for enlightenment compels him to pursue his own spiritual journey. In today's world, many individuals harness the power of dreams not only as guiding visions but as tools for perseverance. For example, Arianna Huffington, the founder of The Huffington Post, has frequently spoken about the importance of following one's passion. She advocates for a "third metric" of success that includes well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving, rather than just financial gain or fame. Huffington's personal journey, which saw her build a media empire and later prioritize well-being over workaholic, reflects the same dual theme of self-actualization found in both The Alchemist and Siddhartha.

Real-Life Stories of Transformation

In recent years, numerous individuals have transformed their lives by pursuing their dreams, even in the face of adversity. One such story is that of Oprah Winfrey, whose rise from a difficult childhood to becoming one of the most influential media moguls in history offers a powerful lesson in self-reliance. Oprah's career was shaped by her unwavering belief in her own potential, similar to Santiago's belief in his treasure. Oprah often speaks about the importance of following one's intuition and recognizing one's inner power, concepts that resonate with the teachings in *The Alchemist*.

Another inspiring example is Neha Agarwal, an Indian entrepreneur who turned her passion for sustainable fashion into a global brand. Formerly a corporate executive, Neha felt disconnected from her true calling. After attending a retreat focused on mindfulness and self-reflection, she made the bold decision to leave her job and pursue her dream of creating eco-friendly fashion. Through her business, she not only achieved personal fulfillment but also contributed to a larger social cause, promoting sustainability and eco-consciousness in the fashion industry. Her story is a modern reflection of how following one's personal legend can lead to both self-actualization and societal impact.

The Role of Mindfulness and Reflection in Achieving Personal Growth

Mindfulness has gained widespread popularity as a tool for personal growth and emotional resilience. In Siddhartha, the protagonist's journey is deeply shaped by periods of reflection and mindfulness, particularly as he immerses himself in nature and meditation. These practices, now embraced worldwide in therapeutic settings, have been shown to improve psychological well-being. Research indicates that mindfulness can significantly reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and improve life satisfaction (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

In 2025, companies such as Headspace and Calm reported significant growth in the use of mindfulness apps, reflecting a rising interest in mental health and self-awareness. This trend mirrors the transformative journeys of both Siddhartha and Santiago, who each undergo deep introspection to connect with their deeper selves. Modern mindfulness practitioners, such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, stress that true personal growth requires intentional reflection of something both characters demonstrate in their stories.

The Role of Society and Challenges in Personal Growth

The journeys of Santiago and Siddhartha also highlight the real challenges and obstacles people face when pursuing their dreams. In today's world, individuals often encounter societal pressures, economic hardships, or personal doubts that make it difficult to follow their true path. Yet, like Santiago and Siddhartha, many individuals must navigate these obstacles while staying true to their values and dreams.

A 2024 study by Harvard Business Review on the rise of entrepreneurship in times of crisis found that economic uncertainty often inspires people to pursue their passions and innovate in ways that would not be possible in more stable circumstances. For example, Sarah Thomas, a small business owner in the U.K., leveraged the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to pivot her business toward sustainability, growing it into a global brand. Her ability to adapt and trust her intuition reflects the journeys of both Santiago and Siddhartha, who must adjust to their circumstances while staying focused on their personal quests.

The parallel journeys of Santiago and Siddhartha not only illustrate the universal human quest for meaning but also highlight the significance of resilience, inner listening, and spiritual growth in navigating life's uncertainties. Through their trials and awakenings, these characters become mirrors for modern individuals who grapple with similar questions about identity, purpose, and

fulfillment. Their narratives serve as guideposts, showing that while external paths may differ, the inward journey toward self-realization remains a shared and transformative experience.

Conclusion

The Alchemist and *Siddhartha* offer more than just narratives of personal growth; they serve as timeless reflections on the human condition. Though Santiago's journey is guided by dreams and signs, and Siddhartha's by lived experience and introspection, both protagonists embark on deeply personal quests that lead them to profound self-awareness and spiritual fulfillment. Their stories, viewed through psychological lenses like Freudian theory, Jungian archetypes, and existential philosophy, illustrate that the journey inward is often the most transformative of all.

While existing studies have explored The Alchemist and Siddhartha independently, this paper uniquely emphasizes their contemporary relevance and applies their spiritual and psychological lessons to real-life modern examples, such as Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, and Neha Agarwal. This bridges classical literature with present-day narratives of self-reliance and personal growth.

What makes these narratives especially compelling today is their enduring relevance. In an era marked by rapid change, uncertainty, and societal pressure, the call to follow one's inner truth has never been more vital. The real-life journeys of individuals such as Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, and Neha Agarwal serve as modern echoes of Santiago and Siddhartha's paths, reminders that self-discovery and personal purpose remain at the heart of meaningful success.

The journeys of Santiago and Siddhartha remind us that the path to self-actualization is both deeply personal and universally resonant. In an increasingly complex and fast-paced world, their stories offer timeless lessons about trusting one's inner voice, embracing uncertainty, and finding meaning beyond material success. These narratives encourage readers to reflect inwardly and recognize that the true treasure lies in understanding oneself and contributing authentically to the world around them.

As we navigate the complexities of 2025 and beyond, these stories urge us to look inward, trust our instincts, and stay resilient in the face of challenges. Whether through dreams, reflection, or mindful action, the pursuit of one's own path is not only possible but also essential. In listening to our inner voice and embracing the journey, we, too, may discover treasures far greater than we ever imagined.

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Displacement and the Fragmented Self: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives and J.M. Coetzee's Explorations of Internal Alienation

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Abstract:

This study investigates the recurring themes of alienation and displacement in the texts of Mukherjee and Coetzee, focusing on how each author addresses the concept of the fractured self within their literary topographies. Mukherjee's immigrant narratives, particularly in novels like *Jasmine* and *The Middleman*, portray cultural displacement through the experiences of her protagonists, who navigate the complex terrain of identity reconstruction in the face of migration. Conversely, Coetzee's fiction, like *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, explores the internal alienation of the protagonists, who are not just displaced by their worlds, but also by a moral and existential crisis. This study examines how Coetzee uses narrative devices such as silence, disembodiment, and untrustworthy narration to emphasize the breakdown of his characters' identities as they grapple with guilt, shame, and the erosion of social and moral coherence. Comparing Mukherjee's immigrant protagonists and Coetzee's alienated figures, this paper examines the psychological aspects of displacement and moral alienation linked to cultural and historical contexts. The study points to how language, narrative voice, and gendered power construct the fractured self in these novels. Finally, this research contributes to the discussion on how diasporic identities and psychological dislocation converge within postcolonial literature, shedding light on the universal condition of alienation within a globalizing world.

Keywords: Displacement, Alienation, Immigration, Identity, Psychological Fragmentation, Diaspora Studies, Postcolonial Literature.

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Introduction

Human experience is defined by movement and negotiation of space, physical and psychic. Although the phenomenon of displacement has elements that can picture itself in the mind of people as instances of geographical and cultural transplantation, it also covers a deep sense of cultural self-awareness that can be produced from the oppressive socio-political system or the reality of an existential crisis. Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives and J. M. Coetzee's exploration of Internal Alienation explore the repercussions of displacement in the construction of the self. One of the leading voices in diasporic literature, Mukherjee vividly describes the challenges encountered by South Asian immigrants in North America as they move into new cultural spaces and create hybrid identities for themselves. On the other hand, J.M. Coetzee, writing from the position of apartheid and the subsequent situation in South Africa, explores the inner psychological fragmentation and existential dislocation that are part and parcel of the modern man living on his own land, typically due to exploitation by the system, and moral yielding on his part.

Although the external displacement of immigration as opposed to the internal displacement of alienation is so different, both Mukherjee and Coetzee provide incontrovertible understandings of how it feels to be "unhoused" – in a physical or psychological sense. The characters created by Mukherjee speak of man's inability to keep their cultural value intact when it is mixed with the values of the adopted society, and they are forced to construct newer selves. Similarly, Coetzee's protagonists, who usually live in oppressive societies, live an existential alienation from their communities and in their own lives, which diminishes the primitiveness of their societies' morality, leaving them open to selfhood.

Displacement and Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's Narratives

Bharati Mukherjee's stories are replete with the intricacies of the relationship between displacement and the formation of identity, mostly in the case of South Asian immigration in North America. Her works examine the implications of how the act of moving out of one's homeland and learning to adjust to another deeply changes an individual's self, specifically in that it creates fragmented identities that often reconstruct and transact with each other.

In Mukherjee's characters, we often see the struggle of having to navigate between the cultural traditions that were passed on to them and the need to survive in the societies in the Western world in which they have found themselves trying to fit. This negotiation is very scarcely a smooth or untangled process; it is not the place of reconciliation; rather, it is full of conflict and tension and a feeling of being a person stuck between the two worlds. As Rocio G. Davis (2006) writes, Mukherjee's characters frequently "escape the simplistic idea of hybridity," as such characters create themselves as fluid and complex beings. They are not simply bicultural; instead, they form new complex identities that sew together the fabric of their pasts and the structure of their present, leading to a changed self.

The disruption of traditional ideas of "home" is an important feature of Mukherjee's concept of displacement. Home is no longer a location but a 'moving space, a debatable locus for her immigrant characters, as proposed by Avtar Brah (1996). Though characters may have nostalgia for their homeland, they also know that they are unable to return to their former sense of self or way of life. Immigration, as an experience, requires the rewriting of home, which in most instances translates to the construction of other "homes" in the adopted country, and in a variety of forms: communities, as personal ties, and a kind of belonging created through experiences in common.

Mukherjee's narratives also underscore the role played by language in the act of identity formation. Immigrants are forced to move into a new linguistic situation, and the fact (or lack thereof) of communication competence in the dominant language of the adopted country can have a large effect on their self-worth and feelings of belonging. In many of her characters, code-switching, or merging languages, becomes a significant strategy because her characters try to articulate their hyphenated identities and complicated cultural realities.

Additionally, in Mukherjee's works, the agency of her characters generally has a special focus, especially her female protagonists, in the process of building identity. Uma Parameswaran (1996) rightly notes that these are not just hapless victims displaced from their homes: they are active agents who choose, risk, resist, and impose their will on their new lives. They tend to undergo massive change, shake off their old identities, and adopt new ones to be able to sustain and succeed in their new environments. This process of self-transformation can be both empowering (as characters stretch to fill voids built in a vacuum) and disorienting (as space becomes occupied by something other than itself). Mukherjee often explores the intricacies of being an immigrant

subject in relation to the "American Dream" promises and tribulations. She shows how deluded new immigrants can arrive with varying hopes and aspirations, often under the illusion of upward mobility in a new life, pursuing one's destiny. Nonetheless, her stories also tell us much about the important barriers that immigrants encounter: discrimination from natives, economic hardship, and difficulty adjusting to new social norms. While others experience a measure of success in life, others see their dreams deterred, or their dreams alluded to, which takes away the dream, and the search for the dream deferred, and elicits course correction on the possibility of the accessibility of the American Dream.

The identity of Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel, also titled *Jasmine*, presents an interesting case study on how displacement can result in extreme transmutations of identity. Jasmine experiences a series of name changes and takes on new roles as she moves from a rural village in India to different destinations in the United States. All these transmutations signal a change in her situation, her relationships, and her conception of herself. Jyoti turns into Jasmine, then Jase, and finally Jane, each of these names signifying an important turning point in her life. Mukherjee employs Jasmine's fluid identity to depict the subtleties of the immigrant experience and how people can reinvent themselves due to displacement and cultural shifts. Jasmine's narrative embodies the themes of transformation, agency, and resistance to fixed identity that are fundamental to Mukherjee's fiction.

Internal Alienation and Fragmented Self in J.M. Coetzee

J.M. Coetzee's fiction provides a deep exploration of the nature of internal alienation and psychological fragmentation of the self within morally complex, postcolonial, and oppressive environments. Whereas Mukherjee's heroes struggle with displacement in the literal, diasporic sense, Coetzee's heroes tend to be estranged from themselves within their homelands, saddled by legacies of violence, racial entitlement, and ethical paralysis. This interior estrangement—not grounded in spatial dislocation but rather in existential and ethical dislocation—is revealed as shattered selfhood, compounded all too often by silence, ethical confusion, and linguistic breakdown.

In novels like *Disgrace* (1999), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), and *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), Coetzee develops protagonists torn inwardly by complicity and resistance, power and impotence, voice and voicelessness. In *Disgrace*, David Lurie epitomizes a man lost in a post-

apartheid world in which his past intellectual and sexual dominance no longer promises coherence or stability. His descent from grace, sparked by his refusal to show remorse for a sex scandal, places him on a journey of moral complexity and self-doubt. His alienation is social and existential: he no longer feels comfortable in a world that is changing around him, and he cannot find a secure moral center within himself. Lurie's reticence in the presence of his daughter's trauma also illustrates the split self—one that cannot make peace between private shame and a changing moral landscape.

In the same way, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate's eventual alienation from the imperial government he serves causes a rupture from within. The Magistrate is first complicit in the empire's brutality, but as his conscience develops, he denies the power he initially exercised and therefore suffers psychological collapse. His fractured selfhood was staged by body pain, hallucinations, and growing alienation from his world and past self. The corporeal and metaphorical torments he experiences signify his reorientation away from being an instrument of power towards becoming a subject of vulnerability, whereby alienation is not only external but inscribed upon the body and mind.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee recounts the life of a mute, a marginalized figure whose presence defies the normative constructions of identity, speech, and resistance. Michael K's muteness and physical disability are metaphors for the splintered, dehumanized self of apartheid. In contrast to Lurie or the Magistrate, Michael K resists incorporation into the discourse of power but is not empowered in any established sense. His withdrawal into silence and solitude is another form of alienation, one that refuses the legitimacy of forced narratives and instead embodies a radical kind of withdrawal. His fragmentation is not merely internal, but ontological; he becomes unreadable, unclassifiable, and unknowable, both to the state and to the reader.

Throughout Coetzee's novels, language itself is a site of disalienation. His characters regularly struggle with the failure of speech and narratives to convey moral or emotional states. This representational crisis indicates a deeper identity crisis; the self cannot be coherently represented because it is inherently divided. Coetzee's minimal prose, metafictional play, and narrative ambiguity all contribute to this fragmentation, encouraging readers to enter the same epistemological and moral space as his characters.

In addition, Coetzee's allegorical and ethical minimalist technique highlights the universal aspects of alienation while holding on to postcolonial particularity. Characters are frequently unnamable or ambiguously located, and in doing so, imply that internal disintegration cuts across national borders, even as it remains conditioned by history and politics. The tension between personal responsibility and structural complicity continues to inform this alienation, as the characters of Lurie and the Magistrate struggle with what they have done and what will be done to them.

Overall, Coetzee's investigation of internal alienation discloses a self-splintered not through migration, but through guilt, power, and the disintegration of coherent moral systems. His protagonists live in a liminal world between resistance and complicity, articulation and silence, the self and others. This alienation is not simply psychological, but profoundly political, subverting hegemonic narratives of redemption and secure identity. In the comparative context of this research, Coetzee's fractured selves are a harsh counterpoint to Mukherjee's diasporic reinventions, and it is implied that dislocation, either physical or internal, is at the heart of the post-colonial condition.

A Comparative Study: Displacement vs. Alienation

It is indeed worth noticing how alienation and displacement are represented by the protagonists in Mukherjee's and Coetzee's works. Mukherjee's characters face displacement predominantly as immigrants, whereas Coetzee's protagonists are alienated from society and the self due to moral, psychological, and historical dislocation. Despite these thematic differences, both authors delve into the complexities of fragmented selves, highlighting the profound effects of personal and collective history on the psyche.

Character Fragmentation

The central contrast between Mukherjee and Coetzee's works lies in the nature of their character fragmentation. In Mukherjee's novels, displacement is primarily cultural. Her characters, immigrants struggling with the difficulties of adapting to a new world, are caught between their native traditions and the expectations of their new host nation. In plays such as Jasmine, the heroine undergoes a multifaceted transformation, assuming various cultural identities as she travels the world, caught between her Indian heritage and the American ideal of self-

transformation. Displacement is geographical as well as cultural, with the identity of the characters constantly changing as they conform to new values and norms.

Coetzee is more concerned with psychological alienation. In books such as *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, protagonists experience an internal collapse of identity, initiated not by migration but by moral, ethical, or historical crises. Lurie's internal fragmentation in *Disgrace* stems from his inability to come to terms with his past behavior and the new moral landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. Similarly, Michael K's alienation is informed by his withdrawal from society, which is a way of resisting the societal pressures that he faces. Therefore, whereas Mukherjee's fragmentation is cultural, having resulted from the external forces of immigration, Coetzee's fragmentation is psychological, precipitated by the protagonists' moral and existential crises.

Structural and Stylistic Differences in Representing the Self

Mukherjee and Coetzee used disparate structural and stylistic strategies to represent a fractured self. Mukherjee frequently employs a linear narrative to follow her character's reinventive journey. Jasmine's path as the protagonist, from a rural Indian village to the city of America, has a defined trajectory of identity change, from being a passive, subordinated character to one of active agency in a foreign landscape. Her characters gradually transform, although agonized, such that displacement, as difficult, also brings about empowerment and reinvention.

Coetzee's narrative style, in contrast, is more fragmented and introspective. His characters' alienation often manifests in reflective and sometimes unreliable narration, which mirrors the confusion and moral ambiguity they experience. In *Disgrace*, the narrative is sparse and minimalist, reflecting Lurie's emotional and psychological withdrawals. Coetzee's novels are more interested in the breakdown of the self and less interested in the potential for self-reinvention, with characters unable to find reconciliation between their actions and their shattered identities. Hence, Mukherjee's style involves narrative continuity and transformation of the self, whereas Coetzee's style involves fragmentation and introspective disintegration.

Gender, Power, and Voice in Mukherjee and Coetzee

Gender is a central concern in Mukherjee's portrayal of displacement, as her female characters deal with gendered and culturally dislocated challenges. Jasmine and The Middleman, Mukherjee's female characters, must navigate gendered power relations that complicate their identities. Jasmine's life, for example, is not so much about cultural displacement as about her resistance to the patriarchal systems that try to fix her. Her migration from India to America requires her to negotiate among multiple cultural and gendered demands, as she tries to create a place for herself in an alien, frequently abusive world.

Coetzee, on the other hand, explores male alienation and the decline of power, particularly in the instance of David Lurie in *Disgrace.* Lurie's privileged status as a white man in post-apartheid South Africa collapses when he experiences personal disgrace. His alienation was directly related to his loss of power and the societal ostracism of his moral shortcomings. In Coetzee's novels, gender is not only a force that controls the lives of the protagonists but also a prism through which power and privilege are examined and ultimately deconstructed. Therefore, Mukherjee's novels tend to focus on female resistance against gendered power relations, whereas Coetzee's novels feature male protagonists whose alienation results from deprivation of power and moral authority.

Resistance and Resilience: Negotiating Identity in Hostile Spaces

Both writers examine how their characters resist external forces, but do so in distinct ways. For Mukherjee, resilience is often seen in the form of self-reinvention. Characters, such as Jasmine, actively negotiate their identities in the face of cultural dislocation. Through adaptation and transformation, they demonstrate the ability to survive and thrive in hostile spaces. For example, Jasmine reinvents herself after personal and cultural trauma, creating a new identity that transcends her past.

Resistance in Coetzee's characters, however, is usually achieved by withdrawing from the world. Michael K's withdrawal into isolation is a resistance to the societal and bureaucratic system that would define him. In *Disgrace*, Lurie's moral refusal to repent is a quiet but stubborn rejection of judgment by society. Coetzee's protagonists do not struggle to reinvent themselves; they resist by isolating themselves, implying a less active resistance whereby their identities remain unresolved. Overall, Mukherjee's characters resist adaptation and self-reinvention, and Coetzee's characters resist them through withdrawal and moral stasis.

Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Class

Both writers respond to the intersectionality of race, gender, and class within their descriptions of alienation and displacement, but with differing focuses. In Mukherjee's novels, race, class, and gender most powerfully intersect in the immigrant condition. Her female protagonists frequently grapple with racial and gendered stereotypes in their new country. For example, in *Jasmine*, race and class play a significant role in how Jasmine is treated and perceived in both India and America. Her struggle is conditioned by the interplay of these social categories in complex ways, emphasizing the multiple natures of her displacement.

Coetzee's fiction, especially set in apartheid South Africa, is more concerned with the intersectionality of class and race. Characters such as David Lurie are alienated not merely due to their individual moral shortcomings but also due to their place within a society structured around racial and class divisions. Michael K's alienation is strongly connected to his being a poor, marginalized character in the apartheid regime. Coetzee investigated how racial, class, and historical forces structure his characters' experiences of alienation, self-doubt, and guilt. Mukherjee focuses on the intersection of gender and cultural displacement, while Coetzee focuses on the intersection of race and class in postcolonial alienation.

Even as displacement and alienation take varying forms in Mukherjee and Coetzee's novels, both authors investigate how external and internal influences condition the breakdown of the self. Mukherjee's figures must deal with the nuances of cultural displacement and gendered authority, whereas Coetzee's characters struggle against psychological alienation motivated by guilt and past moral flaws. Both authors illustrate that identity is continually in motion and is frequently created by forces in society that want to define, stratify, and eventually displace the individual. In these stories, the two authors present a deep understanding of human experience and how external disturbances might lead to intense inner fragmentation.

Language, Voice, and Narrative Technique

In their exploration of the themes of displacement, alienation, and the fractured self, Coetzee utilizes different narrative techniques and styles that signify their characters' psychological and cultural dislocation, whereas Mukherjee's language and voice tell the story of the redemptive

experience of immigration. It is indeed fascinating to explore how both writers employ language, voice, and narrative organization to present the fragmentation of identity in their texts.

In *Jasmine*, the immigration of the protagonist from India to America is paralleled by her learning of English, both as a means of survival and as a vehicle for reinventing herself. As Jasmine's command of English improves, so does she master the art of reinventing herself, evolving from a passive, conformity-oriented woman to an empowered immigrant. In this way, the deployment of English is a marker of individual agency and empowerment, even though it has its origins in colonialism.

Language has also become alienating. Jasmine's conflict with her native language (Hindi) and her acquired English is indicative of her inner fragmentation. Her conflict in finding a middle ground between the two languages is emblematic of the greater cultural and emotional conflicts she experienced as an immigrant. This ongoing negotiation between languages symbolizes her split self, for she is never quite at home either. Therefore, in Mukherjee's fiction, language is a double-edged sword, a tool of both cultural accommodation and psychological disintegration.

Voice and Identity: Feminine Displacement (Mukherjee)

Mukherjee also employed voice to signify her protagonist's changing identities and self-representation conflicts. Voice in her fiction is frequently a tool of resilience and self-knowledge, and is also a cause of conflict. In *Jasmine*, the first-person narrative voice speaks for the internal change of the protagonist. Through Jasmine's narrative voice, the reader perceives her increasing awareness and agency. Her voice, initially hesitant and dictated by societal norms, became increasingly assertive, symbolizing her changing sense of self. Her cultural and linguistic acclimation to another land provides her with the power to speak assertively and with authority, and her voice serves as a necessary vessel for reclaiming her identity.

Yet, this voice is not free from tension. Jasmine's inner struggle stems from the feeling of being torn between her native culture (where she was quiet and oppressed) and the host culture, where she was required to continually negotiate between several roles. Her voice, although powerful, is also tasked with upholding cultural and gendered expectations, illustrating her inner dissonance. Mukherjee's voice reproduces the immigrant experience's multivalence, in which identity is constructed and broken by wanting to express oneself in a host country.

Silence and Disembodiment: Alienated Voices in Coetzee

Where Mukherjee's voices are powerful, empowering, and embodied, those of Coetzee's characters tend to be alienated, distanced, and governed by silence that reinforces their isolation. For Coetzee, silence and disembodiment are key motifs, particularly when his characters are forced to meet their moral or existential dilemmas.

In *Disgrace* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee employs silence— both physical and symbolic—to demonstrate his characters' alienation. David Lurie's failure to connect with other people after his disgrace is manifested in his silence. His silence is a psychological retreat from a world that no longer grants him the luxury of his privileges. Likewise, Michael K's reclusion from society, his disregard for society's constructs, and his silence about speaking signal his disembodiment and disconnection from a world that endeavors to ascribe significance to him.

Coetzee's protagonists, as opposed to Mukherjee's, are not empowered by voice or language. Their silence and disembodiment indicate their capacity to reinvest in meaningful terms with themselves and with others. For Michael K, silence is not a mode of self-expression or empowerment but an indicator of his alienation from societal expectations. He speaks less, drawing further into a self that becomes more fragmented. In Coetzee's world, voice and language are not instruments of empowerment, but are intimately involved in the fragmentation of the protagonist's morality and psychology. Therefore, Coetzee's employment of silence and disembodiment highlights the alienation of the protagonist, with their failure to meaningfully engage with the world or with themselves heightening the fragmentation of their selves.

Narrative Structure and Point of View

Another important element of the narrative technique is the point of view and narrative structure both authors use, which significantly affects how the fragmented self is portrayed. Mukherjee frequently used first-person narration to provide direct access to the protagonist's inner life. This close perspective allows the reader to interact with the character's developing sense of self, as in *Jasmine*. The narrative voice frequently shifts between various times and locations, as reflected in the protagonist's multiple identities. The fluid, non-linear structure of Mukherjee's novels mirrors the fragmented, often disorienting nature of the immigrant

experience. This structure underscores the multiplicity of selves that the protagonist must negotiate, thus reflecting the complex nature of cultural displacement.

In contrast, Coetzee often employs a third-person limited perspective that leaves much of the psychological depth of his characters open to interpretation. The story is lean, disjointed, and sometimes untrustworthy, especially in *Disgrace*, whose narrator is distorted by the justifications that Lurie makes himself in his own mind. This untrustworthiness in narration lends itself to an atmosphere of moral ambiguity and estrangement as the reader is forced to navigate the protagonist's collapsing sense of self. In novels such as *Life and Times of Michael K*, the fragmented and sparse narrative form reflects the emotional distance between the protagonist and the disintegration of coherent identity.

The disjointed narrative form in the novels of both authors is an expression of the dislocation of their protagonists. Mukherjee's fragmented time-form can be interpreted as a way of portraying the immigrant's attempt to synthesize the past and present selves, whereas Coetzee's more disjointed style is an expression of the internal disintegration of identity. The disjointed and nonlinear forms of their novels reinforce the protagonists' disjointed selves, formed by both internal and external forces.

Language and Power: Colonial Legacies and Historical Guilt

The two authors employ language to represent historical and political contexts: Mukherjee in a post-colonial immigration context and Coetzee in an apartheid and post-apartheid context in South Africa. Mukherjee's protagonists frequently struggle with the vestiges of colonial discourse. English, although a survival strategy in the West, is also an ever-present reminder of colonialism. However, Mukherjee employs this language as a transformational tool—her protagonists, such as Jasmine, take command of it to reconstitute their identities against repressive traces of colonialism.

In Coetzee's writing, the language tends to encapsulate the guilt and South African historical trauma. In *Disgrace*, Lurie's efforts to justify himself are always compromised by the moral silence that attends his actions. His efforts to tell his own story are riddled with contradictions and internal contradictions. Thus, language is used not to empower but to expose the fundamental ethical chasms that characterize the characters' alienation from their pasts and their worlds.

Language and voice both have significant functions in representing displacement and alienation in the works of Mukherjee and Coetzee. Whereas Mukherjee utilizes language as a means of cultural adaptation and empowerment, enabling her protagonists to negotiate new selves, Coetzee employs silence and disrupted language to mirror the psychological and moral estrangement of his protagonists. The narrative structures of both writers further entrench the fragmented selves of their protagonists, either through Mukherjee's shifting first-person narratives or Coetzee's focus on consciousness and internal experiences.

Conclusion

Looking at the theme of displacement, alienation, and the fragmented self through Bharati Mukherjee and J.M. Coetzee's works, one realizes that the two authors share complicated narratives in which their characters struggle with outer and inner forces that break down their identities. Despite variation in the level of socio-political contexts—Mukherjee's immigrant experience and that of Coetzee on post-apartheid estrangement—both authors carefully examine how the self gets fragmented and displaced due to forces of culture, gender, power, and historical trauma.

Both writers address the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, though from divergent perspectives. Mukherjee's immigrant women are frequently entangled in a web of racial, gendered, and cultural dislocation, with race and class determining their experiences of alienation in the new world. Women like Jasmine grapple with the intricacies of immigrant identity, where the negotiation of race and gender determines how they are seen and treated in the host country. By contrast, Coetzee's novels, especially those that are set during apartheid South Africa, highlight racial and class-based alienation as central to his characters' psychological fragmentation. In both instances, race and class don't simply demarcate external borders but penetrate the characters' inner conflict, making it more difficult for them to have a sense of self.

Ultimately, though Mukherjee presents a more active presentation of resistance by self-reinvention, Coetzee illustrates a more taciturn, passive resistance through withdrawal and ethical stagnation. Mukherjee's characters, particularly her women protagonists, express resilience through their accommodation and remodeling of their selves, whereas Coetzee's protagonists struggle against their disembodiment and moral estrangement and fight against social expectation through muteness and refusal to engage. Both Mukherjee and Coetzee shed light on how

displacement and alienation inform the fractured self, but through distinct perspectives of gender, power, and social identity. Mukherjee's gendered displacement provides a story of empowerment and self-transformation, whereas Coetzee's examination of male alienation and loss of power demonstrates a deep psychological fragmentation characterized by silence and moral complexity. Collectively, their writings offer a compelling critique of the nature of identity construction in a world filled with social, political, and historical conflict and present an insightful understanding of the human condition in the postcolonial and diasporic worlds.

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Revisiting Gilligan's Ethics of Care: Critical Reflections and Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Carol Gilligan's Ethics of Care, contextualising her work within both historical and contemporary moral discourse. While appreciating Gilligan's basic contributions, the study questions its theoretical boundaries and practical application in today's complicated ethical situation. Drawing on post-2015 literature and worldwide views, the research combines multidisciplinary ideas from environmental ethics, AI ethics, and pandemic-era care practices to highlight the growing importance of care ethics. In this article, a systematic comparison is made between the relational focus that is inherent in Gilligan's work and Kantian moral formalism. The comparison has been made using a wide range of academic literature as well as real-world examples from the fields of education and healthcare. The study compares Gilligan's concepts with Kantian moral theory, not only to differentiate deontological rigour from relational ethics but also to highlight points of compatibility and criticism. Gilligan's approach places an emphasis on empathy, contextual awareness, and the cultivation of interpersonal connections as vital components of an ethical existence. This study also examines some less-discussed criticisms of Gilligan's model, including its ability to be applied to larger groups, its fairness to all, and its compatibility with all cultures.

Keywords: Ethics of Care, Carol Gilligan, Empathy, Moral Development, Relationality

Introduction

During the late twentieth century, the field of moral philosophy experienced a profound shift as Gilligan (1982) mentions that "The ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone" (p. 73). Historically, the field of moral philosophy has

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been dominated by views that are logical, and abstract, and put emphasis on universality and responsibility. Gilligan's approach provides a crucial and beneficial substitute for conventional moral theories by grounding morality in interpersonal interactions and lived experiences. Therefore, in Gilligan's view, care prioritizes relationships. Care is a kind act toward others. It acknowledges—and Gilligan elaborates upon—that life is a kind of interconnectedness inside a network of interactions.

Key features of the ethics of care

Traditional moral theories, particularly those that are founded in rationalist traditions such as Kantian ethics, emphasise abstract thinking, impartiality, and universality. On the other hand, care ethics puts emphasis on human interconnectivity, emotional intelligence, and the moral value of context. In order to get a complete understanding of the unique contributions that care ethics has made, it is necessary to dissect its fundamental characteristics. These include the following:

1. Relational Selfhood: In Gilligan's view, care ethics views persons as intrinsically relational creatures whose identities and moral obligations are influenced by the networks of interactions they inhabit, including family, social, communal, and ecological links. This is in contrast to the traditional notion of people as autonomous moral agents who act in isolation. As an example, moral responsibilities do not originate from contracts or abstract duties in the context of caring relationships, such as the one that exists between a parent and a child. Instead, these obligations are derived from the experienced dependency and emotional links that exist between the persons involved. The act of providing care for a sick kid is not performed out of a sense of impersonal obligation, but rather out of a profound comprehension of the child's requirements, emotions, and personality. In a similar vein, a teacher who stays after school to assist a student who is having difficulty academically is not driven by general guidelines but rather by the one-of-a-kind bond that she has developed with that kid.

2. Contextual Moral Reasoning: A fundamental tenet of care ethics is the rejection of the notion that moral judgements can or ought to be arrived at by applying general, abstract rules in a vacuum. On the other hand, care ethics acknowledges that real-world moral conundrums are sometimes profoundly enmeshed in personal histories, cultural backgrounds, and emotional depth. This is in contrast to Kantian ethics, which emphasises the categorical imperative as a law that applies equally to every rational being regardless of circumstance. Consider, for example, a scenario in which a nurse is faced with the decision of whether or not to let an old patient return

home despite the potential for adverse medical effects. A Kantian approach can place an emphasis only on norms concerning the autonomy of patients or the duties of professionals. On the other hand, a care ethicist would take into consideration a number of different aspects, including the patient's potential anxiety about passing away alone in a hospital, the patient's emotional well-being, the family's ability to provide assistance, and the nurse's own relational grasp of the patient's values.

3. Empathy and Responsiveness: With care ethics, empathy and emotional sensitivity are elevated to core components of moral reasoning, as opposed to being seen as secondary or even destructive, as is the case with some rationalist systems. Care is the capacity to empathize with others. For Gilligan and other feminists, emotions such as compassion, guilt, worry, or love are not seen to cloud judgement; rather, they are regarded as assisting individuals to comprehend the requirements of others and to respond correctly to those requirements. When it comes to occupations that include providing care, such as nursing, social work, or teaching, empathy is often the most effective instrument for taking effective ethical action. It gives practitioners the ability to interact with patients or clients as human beings as a whole, rather than only as cases or as abstract holders of rights. To put it another way, care ethics challenges the long-standing philosophical tendency that considers feelings to be unreliable or ethically meaningless.

4. Moral Particularism: The concept that moral judgements must always adhere to general principles or universal laws is rejected by moral particularism, which is a kind of ethics that is endorsed by practitioners of care ethics. On the contrary, it says that the most effective way to develop moral comprehension is to pay attention to the specifics of each situation. When it comes to this strategy, flexibility and sensitivity are prioritised above strict uniformity. The moral dilemma that a teacher has when selecting whether or not to offer a deadline extension to a student who has consistently handed in work late is something that should be taken into consideration. In response to the request, a Kantian may reply that the rules should be applied in the same manner to all of the pupils. In contrast, a care ethicist would do further research, including the following: Is the student experiencing personal difficulties, problems with their mental health, or the responsibility of providing care for someone else? Has the instructor taken note of the student's genuine effort, notwithstanding the poor results? From this point of view, making an exception is not a sign of moral weakness or contradiction; rather, it is a reaction that is compassionate and conscious of the situation in which it is being made.

Developments in Care Ethics (Post-2015): A Global and Interdisciplinary Overview

The ethics of care, founded on relationality, context, and attention to actual needs, provides an alternative moral framework with far-reaching ramifications. While care ethics originated in feminist moral philosophy, it has grown into a versatile and context-sensitive theory with potential applications outside the interpersonal realm. The multidisciplinary links demonstrate the flexibility of care ethics and its potential to address significant ethical issues of our day. Since 2015, care ethics has developed into a more transdisciplinary and internationally applicable paradigm. Researchers have used its relational and responsive methodology to address several current issues, including environmental degradation, artificial intelligence, global justice, and public health concerns. This discussion will examine the significant intersections of care ethics with environmental ethics, technological ethics, and cross-cultural ethics, highlighting its importance in global moral debate.

1. Environmental Ethics and the Ethics of Care: The integration of care ethics into environmental philosophy has been one of the most significant developments. Environmental ethics typically concentrates on the moral status of the non-human world, including animals, ecosystems, and future generations. The ethics of care provides a relational and affective foundation for environmental concern, emphasising the importance of caring for the natural world as a web of interdependent life forms, in addition to individuals. Traditional environmental ethics often emphasise duties to future generations or biodiversity, while care ethics highlights the urgency and emotional significance of current responsibilities. This makes it possible to take more emotionally and contextually appropriate environmental action.

- Example: In her book *The Perils of the One: Philosophical Essays in Feminism and Nonviolence*, Josephine Donovan (2017) emphasises the need for empathetic, non-exploitative interactions with non-human nature. The concept of 'design for care' in ecological systems emphasises the significance of examining environmental impacts from a care-centred perspective. This is evident in climate justice movements, which employ the language of caring to underscore global and intergenerational responsibilities.

2. Technology Ethics and the Ethics of Care: Care ethics has been used to build and manage AI systems, notably in the eldercare, childcare, and mental health sectors. Technological breakthroughs, particularly in artificial intelligence and automation, create new moral issues that existing frameworks may be unable to face. The ethics of care offers a framework for assessing technology, emphasising human relational needs rather than only efficiency or rights. It

necessitates the design and implementation of technology that honours emotional well-being, dignity, and the nuances of human experience.

- Example: Can a machine care? AI caregiving systems, such as elder-care robots in Japan, are constructed to aid in daily activities, oversee health conditions, and provide companionship. Care ethics compels designers to reflect on aspects beyond mere efficiency, emphasising the importance of emotional resonance, relational authenticity, and the preservation of dignity within machine-human interactions. Shannon Vallor (2016) provides a paradigm in *Technology and the Virtues* that envisions coming technology upholding and enhancing virtues such as empathy and caring.

3. Cross-Cultural Ethics and the Ethics of Care: The literature emerging after 2015 increasingly highlights the diverse and intercultural possibilities inherent in care ethics, resonating with ethical traditions beyond the Western paradigm. Critics contend that care ethics, rooted in Western female discourse, may lack worldwide applicability. Nevertheless, numerous non-Western and Indigenous ethical frameworks embody analogous principles—interdependence, reciprocity, and contextual sensitivity—albeit expressed in distinct manners. Investigating these interrelations expands the domain of care ethics and contextualises it within diverse moral frameworks. Cross-cultural perspectives demonstrate that care ethics is not solely a Western invention, but a universal moral resource that is articulated through a variety of traditions.

- Example: The African ethical concept of Ubuntu, expressed in the adage 'I am because we are' (or 'a person is a person through other persons'), emphasises relationality, social peace, and reciprocal caring. This worldview regards the self not as a separate, autonomous entity, but as essentially entrenched in a web of interactions. This viewpoint reflects the key principles of care ethics. In their foundational work*, Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope* (2018), Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Linda E. Carty underscore the necessity of comprehending and incorporating non-Western paradigms of care—especially those originating from Indigenous, African, and East Asian traditions—to foster inclusive and compassionate feminist movements.

4. Care Ethics in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the essential significance of care ethics in public health and policy. The pandemic exposed the profound interdependence among people, disrupting the notion of individualism, particularly in Western societies. The crisis underscored the undervaluation of caregiving labour and systemic inequalities, leading to the call for a care-centred approach to pandemic ethics. This

perspective emphasises the importance of care ethics during global crises by advocating for policies that acknowledge interdependence, provide support to carers, and address the moral and affective aspects of healthcare. The virus demonstrated that the well-being of one is inextricably linked to the well-being of others, spanning from healthcare systems to supply chains. In response to this reality, care ethics posits that moral responsibility is derived from our concrete, lived relationships, rather than from detached rational duties.

- Example: The lockdown in India during 2020 had a significant and uneven impact on migrant workers, who found themselves devoid of essential resources such as transportation, sustenance, and financial means. A care-ethical perspective would emphasise the importance of support systems—such as housing, healthcare, and transportation—for vulnerable populations, acknowledging that justice is inherently relational and requires a responsive framework. Joan Tronto highlighted these ideas in her article "Long COVID and Seeing in the Pandemic Dark" (2022), which was co-authored with Michael Fine and published in the International Journal of Care and Caring. Scholars such as Eva FederKittay and Joan Tronto provide an important moral framework that emphasises human connection, societal fragility, and the need to create egalitarian networks of mutual assistance. As the globe heals and rebuilds, this viewpoint is critical for creating more equitable and compassionate communities.

5. Artistic and Cultural Expressions: Care Ethics in Practice: The use of care ethics in contemporary art and curating has evolved as a way to address social and environmental issues. Care ethics-informed artistic practices emphasise interconnectedness, shared vulnerability, and empathy development, and thus function as a catalyst for social change and communal healing. This integration emphasises the power of art to represent and spread care-centered principles across various populations. Art, literature, music, film, and performance function as significant avenues for expressing ethical considerations regarding empathy, vulnerability, and the connections that exist among humans and beyond.

- Example: Toni Morrison's novels, such as *Beloved,* underscore the intergenerational and emotional responsibilities of care within Black communities, emphasizing historical trauma and maternal sacrifice. Her literary imagery embodies care as a means of both healing and resistance within repressive environments. Mierle Laderman Ukeles is esteemed for her 'Maintenance Art,' which acknowledges and elevates the significance of quotidian acts of

care, especially those carried out by sanitation workers and carers. These artistic and cultural modes do not simply signify care ethics; rather, they actively embody and enact them.

Ethics of Care vs. Kantian Ethics

Gilligan's ethics of care and Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics are fundamentally different from one another in that they have different conceptions of the moral actor, different approaches to moral reasoning, and different underlying philosophical assumptions about the nature of morality itself. On the other hand, Gilligan advocates for a morality that takes into account lived experiences, emotional intelligence, and relational awareness, in contrast to Kant's pursuit of universal truths that are founded on reason. This difference not only influences how moral decisions are formed but also determines what constitutes ethically significant.

1. Moral Agent

Ethics of care: As Gilligan describes it in her book, the moral agent is understood as a being situated within a web of social interactions, where their identity and obligations are influenced by their affiliations with others.

Kantian Ethics: The moral agent is conceptualised as a rational, autonomous individual endowed with the capacity for moral reasoning that operates independently of external factors.

2. Basis of Morality:

Ethics of care: The foundation of morality lies in the capacity for empathy, responsiveness to others, and the intrinsic desire to foster and sustain human connections.

Kantian Ethics: The ethical value of an action is determined by its conformity to rational obligations and the principles of universal moral law.

3. Moral Decision-Making:

Ethics of care: Moral decisions emerge through a careful examination of the specific context, the emotional realities at play, and the unique needs of the individuals involved.

Kantian Ethics: The process of decision-making adheres to rational principles that ought to be universally applicable across contexts.

4. Role of Emotion:

Ethics of care: Emotions like empathy, compassion, and love are not just ethically significant; they are fundamental to moral understanding.

Kantian Ethics: Emotions are often viewed as inconsistent indicators of moral conduct due to their inherently subjective nature, variability, and vulnerability to bias.

5. Emphasis:

Ethics of care: Highlights interdependence, human frailty, and the maintenance of social connections.

Kantian Ethics: Highlights autonomy, logical coherence, and individual rights.

The Practical Relevance of Care Ethics

The ethics of care, originally grounded in interpersonal relationships, has developed into a substantial moral framework that carries profound implications for public policy, institutional reform, and global justice. This perspective presents a nuanced understanding of morality that is intricately attuned to the complexities of context, the nuances of emotion, and the cultivation of human connections. Verena Tschudin (2003) opines that "the act of care is said to comprise moral attention, sympathetic understanding, relationship awareness, accommodation, and response" (p. 2)

1. Healthcare: Centering Empathy and Patient-Centered Care: In the sphere of healthcare, the ethics of care has driven a change away from methods that are merely clinical or procedural and towards ways that prioritise the emotional and psychological needs of patients. Care ethics urges carers to pay attention to the lived experiences, concerns, and hopes of people who are under their care, as opposed to considering persons as cases that need to be treated in accordance with established procedures.

2. Education: Cultivating Moral Development through Relational Pedagogy: The concept of care ethics plays a significant role in both educational theory and practice. It emphasizes the significance of cultivating connections between educators and students, shifting away from systems that are focused only on transactions or examinations and towards settings that are emotionally sensitive and supportive of student growth.

3. Politics and Law: Toward Compassionate and Inclusive Governance: In the realms of politics and law, care ethics critically examines the conventional liberal emphasis on autonomy,

individual rights, and procedural justice. Rather, it promotes policies that recognize interdependence and seek to safeguard the most at-risk individuals within the community. Social welfare programs that offer child care, elder care, or paid family leave, serve as tangible manifestations of care ethics within the realm of public policy, acknowledging the significance of caregiving labour as fundamental rather than relegated to the private or secondary sphere.

4. Addressing Systemic Injustices: From Personal to Global Ethics: Care ethics offers a robust framework for engaging with structural injustices and addressing global crises. The focus on interdependence and moral responsibility across diverse distinctions renders it particularly pertinent in addressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Rather than only measuring cost-benefit ratios for the majority, a care-ethical approach to climate policy would give priority to the views of Indigenous people, children, and those most impacted by environmental damage.

5. Everyday Morality and the Moral Significance of Care Work: Our perspective of ordinary morality is profoundly altered by the concept of care ethics. It adds ethical prominence to realms that have previously been considered as private or 'non-moral,' such as parenting, friendship, or caring. It has been shown that these realms, which are often feminized and undervalued, form the cornerstone of moral existence. Daily moral decisions—balancing needs, demonstrating patience, suffering hardship—are made by a caregiver at home attending to a sick relative, but orthodox ethical theory hardly acknowledges such work.

Limitations of Care Ethics in Large-Scale Moral Judgments

Although care ethics presents a persuasive alternative to abstract, rule-based moral frameworks by highlighting love, empathy, relationality, and the significance of context, it is not devoid of its shortcomings. One of the most commonly highlighted obstacles is the difficulty of providing precise standards for moral judgement on a larger or systemic scale. Because it is based on specific connections and emotional reactivity, care ethics may not have universalisable norms, which are essential for assessing policies, institutional practices, or large-scale ethical challenges in situations where there is little to no personal connection or none at all. As an example, when it comes to tackling concerns such as climate justice, human rights, or global poverty—contexts that include millions of individuals with whom we do not have direct emotional ties—care-based thinking may have difficulty providing a framework that is consistent and unbiased. Furthermore, the absence of a standardised framework in care ethics might make conflict resolution problematic in situations with opposing demands and connections. On the other

hand, deontological theories such as Kantian ethics, which place a focus on duty, universalizability, and autonomy, are able to provide more consistent standards for judging moral conduct on a social or institutional level. Even though emotional closeness and personal knowledge are essential components of care ethics, they have the potential to unintentionally result in favouritism or moral inconsistency, especially when it comes to favouring people with whom one has relationships over those who are distant or unfamiliar. Furthermore, placing a heavy emphasis on emotional reactions such as empathy or compassion may sometimes mask important moral differences. This is the case in situations when caring for a close person is in conflict with justice or fairness on a larger scale. In this manner, care ethics may have difficulties in preserving its objectivity, particularly in pluralistic communities where a variety of values and connections cross with one another. This is not meant to downplay the importance of care ethics. Instead, it highlights the necessity for a diverse ethical viewpoint—one that respects the emotional richness and human empathy inherent in care ethics, while simultaneously leveraging the systematic precision found in principle-based frameworks.

Kant's Later Ethics: A Move Toward Practical Moral Life

Kant's early ethical writings, particularly *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), are frequently criticised for their abstract, formalistic approach, whereas his later work, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), reflects a more nuanced and practically engaged ethical perspective. In this advanced stage, Kant endeavoured to reconcile universal moral principles with the tangible circumstances of moral life, demonstrating a heightened consciousness of the critiques his prior writings provoked.

1. The Doctrine of Virtue and the Importance of Moral Emotion: Kant, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, recognises that moral motivation transcends mere abstract rationality; it necessitates the development of moral sentiments, including respect, sympathy, and gratitude. He no longer disregards the psychological aspects of moral life, even if he still believes that duty must be the driving principle.

2. Duties of Love and Respect: The Turn Toward Relational Ethics: Kant's distinction between duties of love and duties of respect is a key advance in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. These are not sentimental affections; rather, they are moral obligations to regard others as individuals who are worthy of moral concern. Kant explicitly acknowledges that ethical life entails intricate interpersonal relationships and responsibilities that necessitate contextual awareness. The concept of duties of love refers to the act of actively participating in the well-being of other

people. Duties of respect prevent people from exploiting others as a tool to an end, supporting human dignity in reality rather than theory.

3. Moral Education and the Cultivation of Virtue: Kant's mature ethics emphasises moral education, habituation, and the internalisation of ethical concepts. He knew that it is not enough for people to only be aware of their responsibilities; they must also have the moral fortitude (virtue) to live up to those responsibilities. This demonstrates a clear change from rigorous rule-following to moral development, which is consistent with subsequent ideas like care ethics and virtue ethics.

4. From Abstract Duty to Concrete Application: Kant's later essays explain how moral laws may be applied to real human behaviour and institutions. He delineates particular responsibilities—toward oneself, towards others, and towards society—encompassing obligations of beneficence, gratitude, self-respect, and the injunction against servility or arrogance.

5. Legal and Political Applications: Kant establishes a connection between morality and the frameworks of law and politics in the *Doctrine of Right*. He engages with concepts of justice, rights, property, and the state in a manner that renders his philosophical enquiries profoundly pertinent to the realm of public life. Consequently, the ethical framework proposed by Kant is not merely a matter of personal obligation; it also holds considerable structural importance for institutional contexts.

Conclusion

In revisiting Gilligan's Ethics of Care, this work has evolved from a strictly positive to a more critical and multidisciplinary engagement with her moral theory. Gilligan's initial challenge to abstract, rule-based ethical frameworks focused emphasis on the importance of empathy, connections, and context in moral decision-making. The importance that she places on voice, care, and responsiveness continues to be useful, particularly in fields where moral reasoning interacts with human vulnerability and emotional labour. Nevertheless, this paper has illustrated that care ethics, although fundamental, possesses limitations that necessitate a critical reevaluation, especially in the context of global, structural, or technologically mediated moral dilemmas.

One key limitation explored is the scalability of care ethics. Although successful in fostering interpersonal and community-level connections, the underlying principles may encounter

limitations when confronted with expansive ethical quandaries, such as algorithmic bias in artificial intelligence, resource distribution during pandemics, or pervasive environmental injustices. These difficulties often need frameworks that go beyond the local settings of relationships and call for issues of universality, justice, and structural power—areas in which care ethics has traditionally lagged behind. Through the synthesis of perspectives from environmental ethics, AI ethics, and cross-cultural moral theory, the ethics of care may develop into a more comprehensive and contextually sensitive moral framework. This enhanced framework preserves Gilligan's core focus on empathy, relationality, and moral responsiveness while broadening its application to tackle intricate, large-scale ethical challenges within varied sociocultural and technological contexts. This integration not only increases care ethics' theoretical flexibility but also validates its promise as a globally relevant moral paradigm capable of directing behaviour in an increasingly linked and morally heterogeneous society.

In addition, this paper also investigated the relationship between Kantian moral theory and Gilligan's Ethics of Care. Gilligan's approach is frequently regarded as a counterpoint to Kant's moral theory, which emphasizes universal principles, moral obligations, and the equitable treatment of all individuals. In contrast, care ethics underscores the significance of intimate relationships, emotional nuances, and the particularities inherent in each context. Such a dichotomous framework, however, runs the danger of oversimplifying both traditions. At the time that Kant was writing *The Metaphysics of Morals*, he had already made significant progress in integrating the formality of obligation with the richness of moral experience attained via actual experience. Despite the fact that he did not investigate these concepts to the same extent that care ethicists or Aristotelians did, he eventually came to the realisation that moral character is developed via the process of practice, emotions, and relationships. Accordingly, it is oversimplified to say that Kant's ethics are completely abstract or emotionally detached. It is clear from his later work that he was a philosopher who struggled with the complexities of human moral life. He sought to find a way to combine logical autonomy with moral sensibility, virtue, and interpersonal duty. Even though care ethics expands on these concepts, Kant's subsequent works demonstrate how his perspective on ethics was evolving. He began to focus more intently on the significance of individuals' circumstances, their inherent traits, and the influence of emotions in the process of ethical decision-making.

In summation, Gilligan's Ethics of Care stands as a significant contribution to moral philosophy; however, it necessitates ongoing reinterpretation and recontextualization to effectively engage with the dynamic requirements of our moral landscape. By adopting a more critical,

multidisciplinary, and internationally aware perspective, care ethics may evolve into a comprehensive framework for addressing modern ethical dilemmas, in addition to serving as a philosophy of relational morality. This continual evolution is crucial for moral theory to sustain its responsiveness, inclusivity, and practical utility in the 21st century. An ethically balanced perspective could integrate the relational understanding inherent in care ethics with the normative precision characteristic of Kantian or rights-based frameworks, thereby presenting a more comprehensive conception of moral life that honours both individual circumstances and universal principles of justice. In this way, care ethics can enrich, but not replace, more rigid moral theories when it comes to dealing with the complicated moral issues that arise in modern society.

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In Defence of Kantian Human Dignity in the 21st Century: An Ethical Consideration

Beauty Das[#]

Abstract

This article entitled "In Defence of Kantian Human Dignity in the 21st Century: An Ethical Consideration" is based on the idea that the 21st century, an era of scientific and technological advancements, brings many benefits with various detrimental effects. The most crucial problem that we are facing is the constant deterioration of human value and dignity. This era introduces the idea of posthumanism or transhumanism, whose agenda is to go beyond the humanistic approaches and find themselves as more than humans. In the present venture, I shall highlight the fact that due to technological advancements, these post-humanistic or trans-humanistic approaches are somehow responsible for the deterioration of human dignity. Here, I also shed light on the adverse effects of wars, which are also responsible for the loss of human dignity in the present times. However, the primary intention of this paper is to give a solution in defence of human dignity by revisiting Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, especially his idea of humanity and human autonomy.

Keywords: Human dignity, Value, Reason, Morality, Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Technological advancements, War.

1. Prelude

It is a well-known fact that human beings are valuable by nature. However, the moot question is: Why do humans have special significance over other living creatures? In this regard, various philosophers acknowledge the fact that due to the reasoning capacity possessed by humans, they are intrinsically valuable, and this inner significance secures their status as special, higher beings over other living animals in this mundane world. Humans are the sole creatures in this world with a higher degree of reasoning capacity that separates them from other animals. However, before delving into the discussion of the conception of human dignity, first, we

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should know what we mean by human value, which is the determining factor of human dignity. The English term "value" is the translated form of the Latin word "valēre", which means "be worth." According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, value means "worth, desirability, or utility of" a subject or object. So, in the present venture, since I am dealing with the idea of human value, I can define human values as the worth of human beings. We can categorize human values into two kinds, viz., relative or subjective and absolute or objective[i]. Values that vary from individual to individual are called relative or subjective values. That means values that apply to human beings from external forces come under this category, like different cultural, social, or religious values. On the other hand, a value that is the same for all rational human beings is the absolute or objective value. That means the intrinsically generated value of human beings falls under this category. Through the parameter of human value, we can determine how human beings are related to society, culture, and the external world around them, and this is also the answer to the question of why humans deserve dignity.

Since ancient times, human dignity has been the most debatable issue in philosophy, especially in ethics. If we analyze the history of philosophy, it is apparent that different philosophers were immensely concerned about the status of human dignity, which compelled them to figure out the determining factor that justifies human dignity. Philosophers acknowledge that human dignity can be ordained by means of human values, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic. However, as we know, we live in the 21st century, an era of technological and scientific advancements. This century brings lots of advantages and various challenges for human beings. Different scientific and technological advancements come with various new ideas, whose developments lead us to the transhuman age, where the dignity of natural or biological human beings is being questioned. Humans are compelled to think: Can these transhuman developments lead to the degradation of human dignity? What will the status of human dignity be if such artificial inventions overpower them? If such artificial inventions dominate biological beings, what should be done to protect human dignity? All these questions demand answers, and the primary intention of this paper is to find out the response to such questions, which will intend to defend the status and dignity of natural human beings. To fulfil the purpose of this paper, first, I intend to highlight the problems that are responsible for the deterioration of human dignity. To excavate this fact, the second section illustrates the moral permissibility of transhuman developments and different issues of the 21st century responsible for the degradation of human dignity. Then, the third section examines why humans deserve dignity by following the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, whose notion of humanity bears far-reaching implications, even today. Lastly, the concluding section offers possible suggestions on how to defend and

enhance human dignity from the challenges of the 21st century. Hence, at first, it is necessary to shed light on the primary concern of this paper, i.e., is there any danger in preserving or defending human dignity in this posthuman and transhuman era? The response to this question can be excavated through the debate between transhumanists and bioconservatives, which I shall discuss in the next section.

2. The Status of Human Dignity in the Transhuman Era

The scientific and technological advancements gained momentum between the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Undoubtedly, due to these advancements, humans can ease their day-to-day living. These scientific and technological advancements have led to some new theories, and the transhumanist approach is one of them. The term "transhumanism" was first coined in 1957 by the English biologist and philosopher Julian Huxley(1887-1975). He uses this term to describe human evolution in the post-modern world. So, before delving into the status of human dignity (one of the main concerns of humanism), in the 21st century, it is crucial to know: What is the concept of transhumanism, and how does it differ from humanism? To respond to this question, we should look back at the history of philosophy. It is evident that at the initial stage of philosophical thinking, different philosophers were immensely concerned about the truth of reality, i.e., the true nature of this mundane world. However, the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras' famous contention, "Man is the measure of all things," shifts philosophical thinking from nature-centric to anthropocentric. From that time, different philosophers showed interest in excavating the true nature of human beings and their relation with the external world around them. This human-centric approach to philosophy gave birth to humanism, which came into force mainly in the Enlightenment period. Humanism is the philosophical approach that protects human rights and their relation to each other by emphasizing their rational, autonomous, and conscious nature. This approach also emphasizes the fact that the inner significance of human beings enables them to become responsible agents, and due to this, they can control all external affairs of the natural world. That means, in simple words, we can say that humanism is the philosophical stance that promotes the natural power of humankind. However, in the late 20th century, a new philosophical movement emerged to challenge and criticize humanism, viz., posthumanism. This posthuman movement mainly criticizes the human-centric approach, human agency, and human power to control everything. This posthuman movement also introduces another approach called transhumanism. These two movements of posthumanism and transhumanism intend to reconsider or redefine the meaning of human beings with the help of a new theoretical framework. However, there is a fundamental difference between these two

movements, i.e., posthumanism intends to criticize the biological, moral, and ontological positions of humanism. In contrast, transhumanism tries to strengthen the humanistic approach as an extension by changing or improving it, with the help of science and technology.[ii] However, in the present venture, I shall only deal with transhumanism to discover the status of human dignity in contemporary times.

To illustrate the status of human dignity in this transhuman era, we should discuss the activity or scope of transhumanism. If we look into the characteristics of human beings, then the first thing that comes to our mind is that humans are rational beings with limitations. Here, we define humans as limited beings because they possess some limited capacity. Among the different limitations of humans, the most crucial limitations are their epistemological and ontological limitations. That means if we thoroughly analyze the nature of human beings, we find that humans possess limited cognitive ability, which does not allow them to go beyond their epistemological limitations. Likewise, humans are short-lived creatures, and this short lifespan indicates their ontological limitations. All these limitations are inherent to human beings, i.e., they are natural or biological. However, as I have mentioned earlier, transhumanism is the movement that mainly tries to blur the line between humans and their limitations by changing or improving human conditions. Transhumanism holds that it is possible to modify human nature and transcend their epistemological or ontological limitations, using various technological methods and applied science.[iii] However, the question is: What kind of modification of human nature are they talking about? In this context, they hold that though humans are biologically limited beings, it is possible to improve their biological nature by increasing their physical and intellectual capacities, health span, or even their life span, with the help of technology. Transhumanists promote the view that, due to "morphological freedom"[iv] and "reproductive freedom,"[v] humans are free to choose different "human enhancement technologies."[vi] By adopting "human enhancement technologies," humans can become transhumans with greater capacities than any usual human beings. This transhumanist wave is constantly working on various biotechnological advancements, e.g., artificial wombs, anti-ageing therapy, artificial intelligence, brain microchips, gene editing therapy, robotic arms, cyborgs, etc. All these biotechnological tools are used to enhance human capacity.

Now, a question may intrigue one's mind: If such human enhancement technologies are made for the well-being of humans, then what is the problem with these technological advancements? In response to this question, it can be said that all these technological advancements may increase the physical and intellectual capacities of humans. Still, all these methods are, by nature, dehumanising." In the present time, due to these technological advancements, humans are facing

some potential losses like human dignity, autonomy, and also their privacy. In this context, it is vital to highlight the view of bioconservatives, who oppose the transhumanist agenda. Bioconservatives are immensely concerned about human dignity and human values. They hold that all these human enhancement technologies that make humans "more than human" might undermine human dignity or something valuable about being human. These creations of transhumans will be a threat to ordinary natural human beings.[vii] With the help of an instance, it can be illustrated why it threatens ordinary human beings. Suppose a transhuman using a brain microchip can enhance the brain's functioning capacity. Due to this implantation, the transhuman can be more intellectual than an ordinary human. Even by implanting various internal robotic limbs, transhumans can be more powerful than ordinary humans. These types of implantations might be a serious threat to ordinary human beings, which can make them slaves of transhumans. Because all these human enhancement technologies are so expensive, not everyone can afford them. This inaccessibility to technology promotes a boundary between the poor and rich, where transhumans can access superior existence, which is the direct path to discrimination and inequality. Due to this boundary, it might be possible that in the future transhumans can overpower ordinary humans because it is an apparent fact that the strong always want to oppress the weak. The agenda of transhumanism is dehumanising because its biotechnological advancements harm the status of human values and dignity by changing their true biological nature. Hence, these biotechnological transformations of humans are potentially dangerous for mankind.

Moreover, besides these transhumanistic challenges, there is another issue that causes the deterioration of human value and dignity, i.e., war. In the era of scientific and technological advancements, different countries use various technologies to make themselves powerful. They prepare themselves for the war by making powerful nuclear bombs, bioweapons, artificial intelligence, information technology, etc. To my mind, a war is never a good thing for the well-being of mankind. Maintaining peace is a crucial duty for human beings. Though a war is held between two countries due to political interest, it causes immense loss of human lives, dignity, and value. Because of the commencement of war between the political leaders, the lives of innocent people are always at stake, which is never acceptable. Every human being has the right to live their life peacefully. However, various political leaders, due to some political interests, decide to wage war without even thinking about the innocent citizens of the countries. They use their innocent citizens by sending them to war or taking the lives of citizens of the opponent country. This war is nothing but the use of humans as a means to achieve an end, which is highly unacceptable for the sake of human dignity. Hence, this analysis leads us towards the question: Is

there any possibility of preserving or defending human dignity in the era of technological advancements? For the response to this question, in the next section, I shall propose a ground in defence of human dignity by following Kant's moral philosophy, which not only suggests the reason for considering humans as dignified beings but also teaches the defence mechanism to preserve human dignity.

3. Human Dignity in the Light of Kant's Moral Philosophy

By considering the absolute value theory, it can be said that human beings possess an intrinsic rational capacity that makes them worthy of themselves, and due to this absolute value, they demand or deserve dignity. If we thoroughly analyze Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy, it is apparent that he established the foundation of his entire critical philosophy based on the notion of human reason. He considers the notion of human reason as the central theme of his transcendental critical philosophy. In his monumental work Critique of Pure Reason (1781/ 1787), Kant intends to show us that human reason has two sides, i.e., one is theoretical and the other is practical. Through the theoretical reasoning capacity, humans can comprehend the cognition of the empirical world. To put it differently, it is the practical reason that determines the interest of humans regarding the sense of morality, and freedom of their will, and also satisfies their practical needs for some supernatural transcendent things, which do not have objective reality but haunt them in their thinking, like God, the afterlife, etc. So, the practical interest of human reason is the source of the sense of morality in human beings. That means the practical function of humans' faculty of reason commands them what they ought to do, how to behave, etc., and we can determine the absolute human value responsible for their dignity by examining their rational moral nature. Hence, for the proper illustration of the Kantian perspective on human dignity, it is essential to highlight Kant'sidea of morality, because it is evident that Kantian ethics is the basis for his conception of humanity, which helps us to excavate the fact of why humans deserve dignity over other living creatures.

Kant illustrated his moral stance in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*[viii](1785) and The *Critique of Practical Reason*[ix](1788). All this literature indicates that he was immensely concerned about the definition of moral action. However, to fulfil the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to focus on the definition of moral actions because this definition will help us to determine human value and dignity. In this context, Kant defines moral action as one that is not driven by any form of inclinations, compassion, or consequences. He considers that a moral action ought to be performed with a sense of duty. Kant emphasizes the motive behind any action to recognize moral action. For ease of understanding, I can give an instance. Suppose I have

donated some food to the children of an NGO and shared some pictures of that event on social media, thinking that it is praiseworthy in front of both the virtual and non-virtual society. In this case, this action cannot be considered moral because I did that action not with a sense of duty but to fulfil some personal gain. So, for Kant, a moral action can be determined only by the motives behind those actions. This motive must be based on the sense of duty. As we know, humans can control the intentions behind their actions, but the consequences of those actions are not in their hands. That is why Kant emphasizes the motives behind the actions rather than the consequences, in the case of determining an action as moral.

Now, one can raise the following question: What is the thing that instigates the sense of duty in humans? In this regard, Kant intends to show us that only *good will* can generate a sense of duty for moral actions. Kant holds that *good will* is good without any qualification because other goods (like courage, intelligence, prudence, etc.) also can be used to fulfil evil intentions. For instance, people can use their courage to kill someone. This example indicates that courage is good, but cannot be considered good when used to fulfil an evil intention. But *good will* is good in itself and can never be used for malicious purposes. This *good will* helps humans to choose moral duty freely. So, the *good will* and the sense of duty are both purely motivated by the command of practical reason.[x] In the case of moral actions, there is no room for emotions because Kant established his entire notion of morality based on the human capacity for reason. If we focus on the nature of reason and emotion, we find that both are incompatible. That is why the sense of duty always contrasts with the sense of inclinations or feelings.

In this context, Kant sheds light on his conception of the categorical imperative. Kant believes that rational human beings perform various actions either from a sense of inclination or from a sense of duty. A sense of duty comes from our respect for moral laws.[xi] Action performed with a sense of duty is naturally categorical. These duties are *categorical* in the sense that they are unconditional. For instance, always respect elders; this maxim comes under the categorical imperative. That means in the case of moral actions, there is no scope for "if-then" maxims(Kant calls such "if-then" maxims hypothetical imperatives), which are driven by our inclinations. So, Kant suggests that for moral actions, rational human beings only pursue those maxims that are categorical or unconditional by nature.

In his work, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*,[xii] Kant mentions three formulations or expressions of the *categorical imperative*, or as Kant called the "supreme principle of morality."[xiii]Our practical reasoning capacity guides this principle. Among these three expressions, the first one is the "Formula of Universal Law," which indicates that humans

should act by employing those maxims that can apply to all rational human beings. That means the maxims chosen by different rational beings are subjective. However, humans should wish for the universal or objective validity of those maxims for moral recognition of their actions. The second expression is the "Formula of Humanity," which implies that for the recognition of moral action, humans should never use other fellow beings as the means to fulfil their desired end. After this, the last expression of the categorical imperative is called the "Formula of Autonomy."This formulation suggests that humans possess free will to choose different maxims, and that is why they should not fall under the influence of other forces like emotions, passions, or other fellow beings, for their moral actions. These three expressions of the supreme principle of morality help humans to find their maxims perfect for moral duties. However, to fulfil the purpose of this paper, i.e., to excavate Kant's perspective on human dignity, we should focus on the second and third expressions of the *categorical imperative*, i.e., "Formula of Humanity" and "Formula of Autonomy."

Kant illustrates his "Formula of Humanity" in the following way:

> "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[xiv]

This expression of the "supreme principle of morality" is a manifesto of humanity and the answer to the question: why should humans deserve dignity? By introducing this formulation, Kant intends to convey that every rational human being should be respected and deserves dignity because of their common intrinsic value (i.e., their rational nature or the power of the faculty of reason), which they share with their fellow beings. This inner significance makes them worthy of themselves. Each human being is, by nature, an end in themselves. Because the faculty of reason not only prescribes laws to humans for their everyday conduct but also prescribes laws to itself so that it can validate and examine itself for the betterment of its functions. Humans can decide what to do in various challenging situations, using their faculty of reason. This means that, in changing conditions, they can change their decisions with new considerations. So, humans, due to their reasoning capacity, are intrinsically valuable. This rational capacity helps them to constitute and find the true nature, which is the essence of humanity. Due to this intrinsic worth of human beings, they always deserve respect and dignity. That is why they should never use themselves or other fellow beings as a means to achieve a specific end. All human beings should respect each other because they share an absolute common value that makes them special among

other living beings. Moreover, Kant's "Formula of Autonomy" also plays a crucial role in determining and preserving human dignity. The "Formula of Autonomy" states that:

> "So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim."[xv]

This formulation indicates human autonomy or freedom to choose the laws of morality. Humans are the only creatures of this universe bound to moral laws prescribed by their practical reasoning capacity. Rational beings act according to moral laws, where they can will freely, and due to this free will, they can wish for any moral law to be universal. That means the human faculty of practical reason commands different moral laws to navigate the external affairs around them. However, due to their freedom of will, they can freely choose these laws by applying their rational power. There is no obligation to obey such laws; instead, due to the sense of reverence, they act, judge, and behave in accordance with reason. This autonomy or freedom of the will of human beings provides supreme value to them, which is why they deserve dignity. Due to these qualities, such as humanity and autonomy, we can determine the absolute value of humans, which ensures human dignity. So, up to this, it is palpably clear why we consider humans as dignified beings; or, why humans should deserve dignity. Hence, it can be said that by keeping the Kantian idea of human dignity, or the method of respecting humanity in mind, humans can preserve or protect their humanity in the 21st century.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be said that in the 21st century, there are lots of problems that cause the deterioration of human dignity. Among these problems, I have mentioned the two most crucial issues: transhuman developments and war. As a supporter of humanism, Immanuel Kant beautifully showed us that humans are dignified beings due to our intrinsic rational and moral nature. Our qualities of humanity and autonomy always deserve value and dignity. We consider humans to be rational moral beings, and this status is given to us naturally or biologically. However, in this present era, due to technological advancements, we find a difference between humans and transhumans that undermines the Kantian model of human dignity. There is no doubt that transhumanistic developments are made for the well-being of humans, but we have to ponder the usage of these technological means for the sake of human dignity. To my mind, not all technological advancements are dehumanizing. If human beings, with the help of technology, want to eradicate some physical disability and implant a limb (like a leg, hand, etc.) in their bodies, then there is nothing wrong with it. We cannot say these are

dehumanizing. However, it will be dehumanizing only when we use these technologies in order to change or improve some intrinsic nature of human beings. That means if we want to increase our intellectual capacity, or the power of brain functions by using brain chips, or if we want to be immortal by implanting new genes in our bodies, then I think it will be dehumanizing. Hence, we have to be cautious about the use of technology.

Moreover, we have to stop wars for the sake of humanity. We must not forget that war is not the solution to any political or geographical problem. Here, a question may intrigue us: What is the practical basis of this thinking, where the present scenario is different? In this context, it can be said that it is high time to revisit Kant's notion of the rational moral being. As I have mentioned earlier, humans are rational beings, and their rational nature makes them responsible for their actions. So, as conscious rational beings, we should generate our goodwill to develop our moral nature to avoid war-like situations. This will be possible only when we act by following our reasoning capacity. If we act under the guidance of reason, then it will help us to decide about the moral permissibility of our actions. By being an actual moral agent, it will be easy for us to understand where we should and should not use technology for the well-being of mankind. This means that in a war-like situation, we have to think about its consequences, which implies nothing but the loss of humanity and human dignity. When we consider such an issue, keeping the idea of humanity and human dignity in mind, we can avoid such war-like situations. Here, we can consider Kant's idea of humanity and human dignity not as a solution to these problems but as a moral appeal to mankind. Hence, it can be said that in the present time, where constant deterioration of human value and dignity is apparent, we should develop our rational moral nature to defend mankind and human dignity.

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[i] Here, the term "objective" has been used in the sense that it can be the same and applicable to all human beings.

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[iv]"Morphological freedom" is a human right that allows humans to modify their bodily shortcomings, i.e., humans can do whatever they want to do with their bodies.

[v]"Reproductive freedom" is mainly concerned with women's rights, where they can control their reproductive system as they can freely choose whether they are ready to reproduce or family planning and contraception or not.

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मानव अधिकारों तथा मूल्यों का नैतिक विवेचन।

(Manav Adhikaron Tatha Moolyon Ka Naitik Vivechan)

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Abstract:

The primary objective of this article is to explain and examine Human rights and values from Vedic perspectives. Though a clinical systematic development in ethics and values we can identify in the Western tradition, also in India, more specifically in Vedic Philosophy, we witnessed a discussion concerning human rights and values. The core of the Indian philosophical tradition lies within the ethical aspects of Human life. Almost every Indian philosophical tradition emphasises human values from ethical, Moral, and religious perspectives. In Indian tradition, the concept of values is interconnected with the concept of Dharma. The main theme of this paper is reflected within the discussion on dharma, values, and purusvarthas from the Vedic perspectives.

This article is composed of three sections. The first section consists of an introductory section in which I made a discussion on different values of human life. The second section is confined to discussing human values from the Vedic perspective. And, the final section is the concluding remarks in which the article suggests the relevance of the Vedic concept of human values in the present global perspectives.

Keywords: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Value, Human Rights.

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(I)

मानव जीवन में अधिकारों के साथ, साथ मूल्यों का महत्वपूर्ण स्थान हैं। आधुनिक मानव वैज्ञानिक एवं भौतिक क्षेत्र में प्रगति की पराकाष्ठा प्राप्त है। मनुष्य चन्द्रमा तक पहुँच चुका हैं। मंगल ग्रह आदि पर उड़ाने निरंतर जारी है। परन्तु मानव के जीवन मूल्यों की अधोगति निरंतर जारी है। ऐसी स्थिति में मूल्यों को नैतिक मानदंडों के रूप में स्वीकार करना अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है। मानव अधिकार तथा मूल्य सम्बन्धी विवेचन पाश्चात्य तथा भारतीय नीतिशास्त्रों में किया गया है। जैसे - पाश्चात्य नीतिशास्त्र में अधिकारों के साथ-साथ मूल्यों का विवेचन साध्यमूल्य (Intrinsic Value) तथा साधनमूल्य (Extrinsic Value) के रूप में किया गया है। इसके अतिरिक्त –

1- शुभ और अशुभ (Positive and Negative- Good and Evil).
2- स्थायी और अस्थायी (Permanent and Transient).
3- उत्पादक तथा अनुत्पादक (Productive and Unproduvtive).
4- आर्थिक मूल्य (Economic Value). जैसे- धन-दौलत।
5- मनोरन्जन के मूल्य (Value of Recreation). जैसे- सिनेमा।

अनेकों प्रकार के मूल्यों का वर्णन किया गया है। मूल्यों के इस प्रकार वर्गीकरण को समेटते हुए कहा सकता है-

1- शारीरिक मूल्य (Bodily Value).
2- सामाजिक मूल्य (Social Value). तथा
3- आध्यात्मिक मूल्य (Spiritual Value).

उपर्युक्त सभी वर्गीकरणों को - जैविकमूल्य (Organic Value) एवं अतिजैविक मूल्य (Hyper-Organic Value) कहा जा सकता है।

भारतीय नीतिशास्त्र में जीवन के नैतिक मूल्यों का सबसे पहले व्यावहारिक पक्ष एवं आध्यात्मिक पक्ष का विवेचन करते हुए मानव जीवन का सर्वोच्च लक्ष्य (Highest Goal/Aim)निःश्रेयस की बात करते हैं। दूसरे शब्दों में इसे *Summum Bonum* भी कहते है। भारतीय नीतिशास्त्र में वैयक्तिक सद्गुणों के अभ्यास के माध्यम से अधिकार-कर्त्तव्य तथा मूल्यों का निर्धारण- को महत्व प्रदान किया गया है। इसी क्रम में - धर्म, पुरुषार्थ, ऋण, यज्ञ इत्यादि का विवेचन किया गया है। अधिकार को पश्चात् करते हुए कर्त्तव्य पालन को सर्वाधिक महत्व प्राप्त है। अतः अधिकार परिणाम के रूप में विवेचन किया गया है। साथ-

साथ ज्ञान आरोहण करना एक प्रकार कर्त्तव्य के रूप में देखते हुए पहले सद्ज्ञान अतः पर अपवर्ग की प्राप्ति को लक्ष्य बताया गया है। जिसे Highest Aim कहा गया है।

इसी क्रम में पुरुषार्थ चतुष्ठय में धर्म का विवेचन करना आवश्यक प्रतीत होता है। उससे पूर्व पुरुषार्थ का अभिप्राय जो पुरुष के लिए आवश्यक तथा लाभदायक हो उसका चतित्र धारण होना चाहिए। यहाँ यह स्पष्ट करदेना अच्छा होगा की व्यक्ति के कर्मो की लक्ष्य को ही पुरुषार्थ संज्ञा प्राप्त है। यह एक समन्वयवादी दृष्टिकोण है। मानव जीवन के सभी आवश्यकताओं के साथ पुरुषार्थ सम्बन्ध युक्त है। मानव जीवन के पुरुषार्थ चार है। इन चारों पुरुषार्थों का संक्षिप्त चित्रण निम्न प्रकार किया जाता है।

(II)

A) धर्म –

धर्म शब्द धृ -धारणे धातु से अर्तिस्तुसुहुसृध 0(उणादि कोश 1/140) सूत्र से प्राप्त मन् प्रत्यय के योग से धर्म शब्द निष्पन्न होता है। अर्थात् धारणात् धर्मं इत्याहुः ध्रियते अनेन लोकः - इत्यादि व्युत्पत्ति के अनुसार -जिसे आत्मोन्नति और उत्तम सांसारिक सुख हेतु धारण किया जाए, अथवा व्यवस्था व मर्यादाओं का ध्यान रखा जाये - केवल उसे ही धर्म संज्ञा प्राप्त है।

भारतीय नीतिशास्त्र का आकर ग्रन्थ मनुस्मृति में धर्म शब्द के अर्थ का विवेचन बहुत व्यापक दृश्टिकोण से किआ गया है। जैसे आध्यात्मिक उद्देश्यसाधक- जो मुख्यार्थ है एवं लौकिक व्यवहारसाधक कहा गया है-वेदाभ्यासः तपः ज्ञानं इन्द्रियाणां च संयमः , धर्मक्रिया आत्मचिन्ता च निःश्रेयसकरं परम्। मनुस्मृति ०। इस श्लोक में वेद का अभ्यास, तप, वेदादि सत्यविद्याओं का ज्ञान प्राप्ति, इन्द्रिय संयम, धार्मिक क्रिया और आत्मचिन्तन - इन छः उपायों को मानव कर्त्तव्य के रूप में निरूपण किया गया है। महर्षि मनु महाराज ने अपनी कृति मनुस्मृति में इन कर्त्तव्यों को धर्म के रूप में दस (10) लक्षणों के रूप में निरूपण किया गया है। जैसे-

धृतिः क्षमा दमोस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रिय निग्रहः ।

धी-विद्या सत्यमक्रोधः दशकं धर्म लक्षणम् ।। मनु ० 6 /92.

इस श्लोक में मानव सद्गुणों को दस (10) प्रकारों में विभाजन किया गया है। जैसे-

1- धृति= धैर्य धारण करना,

2- क्षमा= क्षमाशील होना,

3-दम= मन को नियंत्रण करना,

4-अस्तेय= चोरी ना करना,

5-शौच= अन्तः तथा बाह्य शुद्धिकरण,

6-इन्द्रिय-निग्रहः = इन्द्रियों को नियन्त्रण करना,

7-धी= बुद्धि,

8-विद्या= परा- अपरा विद्या,

9-सत्य और

10-अक्रोध= क्रोध न करना,

इत्यादि कर्त्तव्य के पालन को ही धर्म बतलाया गया है। वेदानुकूल मनुस्मृति में अन्यत्र कहा गया है –

धर्मेण हि सहायेन तमस्तरति सुदुस्तरम्। मनु 0 4/242

क्योंकि धर्म के सहाय से दुष्कर-दुःख सागर को जीव तैर जाता है। उपर्युक्त श्लोकों के माध्यम से मानव कर्त्तव्यों का विश्लेषण किया गया है। अतः अधिकारों का वर्णन करते हुए मनु महाराज कहते है-

अनेन विप्रो वृत्तेन वर्तयन् वेदशास्त्रवित्।

व्यपते कल्मषो नित्यं ब्रह्मलोके महीयते॥ मनु0 4/260.

एतद्वो अभिहितं सर्वं निःश्रेयसकरं परम्।

अस्मात् प्रत्युतो विप्रः प्राप्नोति परमां गतिम्॥ मनु0 12/116.

अर्थात् वेदशास्त्र के ज्ञाताअर्थात् वेदशास्त्र के ज्ञाता इस व्यवहार से वर्ताव कर्ता हुआ पाप रहित होकर ब्रह्म के आश्रय में मग्न होकर आनन्द को प्राप्त कर्ता है।

द्वितीय श्लोक में कहा गया है की अपवर्ग या निःश्रेयस प्रदायक समस्त कर्त्तव्य- कर्म को करते हुए परम गति को प्राप्त कर सकते है। इस प्रकार कर्त्तव्य निर्धारण के माध्यम से अधिकार का निरूपण तथा मानव मूल्यों का उल्लेख स्पष्टाकार में किया गया है।

अतः पर धर्म का व्यावहारिक पक्ष - जो आत्मिक, मानसिक तथा शारीरिक उत्थान करने योग्य है। मनुष्य में मानवत्त्व और देवत्त्व का विकास करने वाले, धारण करने वाले उत्तम सुखसाधक श्रेष्ठ व्यावहारिक एवं सामाजिक कर्त्तव्य, मर्यादा और विधान व कानून को धर्म कहलाता है। व्यावहारिक क्षेत्र में होने के कारण कर्त्तव्य- कर्म है। जिसमें देश-काल-परिस्थितिवश कुछ एक परिवर्तन आ सकते है। जैसे-

1- सत्यं ब्रुयात् प्रियं ब्रुयात् न ब्रुयात् सत्यमप्रियम्. मनु0 4/138,
2- योषितां धर्ममापदि- मनु0 9/56,
3- एष धर्मः स्त्रीपुंसयोः मनु 09/103,
4- दण्डं धर्मं विदुर्वुधाः मनु0 7/18,
5- राजधर्मान् प्रवक्ष्यामि मनु 07/9,

आगे फिर से बोला गया है-

वेदस्मृति सदाचारः स्वस्य च प्रियमात्मनः ।

एतद् चतुर्विधं प्राहु साक्षात् धर्मस्य लक्षणम् ॥ मनु0.

इसके अतिरिक्त भारतीय दर्शन शास्त्र में भी कहा गया है। जैसे- वैशेषिक दर्शन के प्रणेता ने प्रारम्भ करते समय बोले –

1- *अथातो धर्म जिज्ञासा*। पूर्व मीमांसा सूत्र 1/1/1 0

अथ को धर्मः, किं तस्य लक्षणं इति चेत्, तद् उच्यते - यागादिरेव धर्मः "तल्लक्षणं वेदप्रतिपाद्यः प्रयोजनवदर्थो धर्म इति"- पूर्व मीमांसा सूत्र में धर्म को परिभाषित करते हुए महर्षि कणाद पहले यज्ञ आदि क्रिया को धर्म की संज्ञा प्रदान किया, पश्चात वेद प्रतिपादित तथा इष्ट साधक वाला प्रयोजन हो उसे ही धर्म नाम से परिभाषित किया है।

2- *अथातो धर्मं व्याख्यास्यामः*। वैशेषिक सूत्रः 1/1/1

3- *यतो अभ्युदय निःश्रेयस सिद्धिः स धर्मः*। वैशेषिक सूत्रः 1/1/2.

4- *चोदनालक्षणो धर्मः*।पूर्व मीमांसा 1/1/2

इसी प्रकार धर्म को मानव के कर्त्तव्य- कर्म के रूप में निरूपण किया गया है। इसके अन्तर्गत समस्त प्रकार के नैतिक प्रत्ययों का विशद विश्लेषण किया गया है।

B) अर्थ (Wealth)-

पुरुषार्थ चतुष्टय में अर्थ द्वितीय पुरुषार्थ के रूप में परिगणित होता है। अर्थ को संकुचित और व्यापक दोनों ही अर्थ में प्रयोग किया जाता है। 1- धर्म को समझने के लिए अर्थ को समझना आवश्यक है। अर्थ यहाँ साधन के रूप में प्रयुक्त हुआ है। 2- अर्थ का सम्बन्ध धन-संपत्ति के साथ होने कारण भौतिक उपकरण तथा भौतिक सुख से है। मनुष्य को अपने जीवन में अनेकों कर्तव्यों और उत्तरदायित्वों की पूर्ति हेतु अर्थ की आवश्यकता होती है। अभिप्राय यह है की जीवन की सभी कामना, सुविधाय, इच्छा को पूर्ण करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका अदा करते है। भारतीय नीतिशास्त्र में अर्थ की महत्ता और आवश्यकताओं पर विशेष जोर दिया गया है। जैसे- महाभारत में अर्थ को जीवन का उच्चतम धर्म बतलाया गया है।

धनमाहुः परं धर्म धने सर्वप्रतिष्ठितम।

जीवन्ति धनिनोलोके मृता येत्वधना नराः ॥

ये धनादपकर्षन्ति नरः स्ववलं स्थिताः।

ते धर्मार्थिकामं च प्रमध्नन्ति नरं च तम् ॥ महाभारत उद्योग पर्व 72 /23 -24

इसका अभिप्राय यह है की जो धन से अनादृत है वह धर्म से भी अनादृत होते है। अर्थ के बिना जीविका निर्वाह असंभव है। मानव को सभी सुखों का उपभोग धर्मानुकूल करना चाहिए। मानव जीवन में सुखों को सर्वोपरि महत्ता दी गई है। इसीलिए मनु महाराज जी ने त्रिवर्ग को ही श्रेय बतलाया है - अर्थात - धर्म, अर्थ व काम। आगे कहते हैं –

धर्मार्थादुच्यते श्रेयः कामार्थो धर्म एव च।

अर्थ एवेह वा श्रेयस्त्रिवर्ग इति तु स्तिथिः ॥ मनु 2/224

अर्थ के अभिप्राय को और अधिक महत्ता प्रदान करते हुआ कहते है- की अर्थ और काम यदि धर्म विरुद्ध हो तो ऐसे अर्थ को त्याग देना चाहिए।

परित्यजेदर्थकामौ यौ स्यातां धर्मवर्जितौ।

धर्मचाप्यसुखोदर्क लोक विकृष्टमेव च॥ मनु 0 4/176

C) काम-

अध्ययन- अध्यापन कि दृस्टि में काम तृतीय पुरुषार्थ है। मानव जीवन में इसका बहुत ही महत्वपूर्ण स्थान है। कामना -भावना तथा इन्द्रिय सुख इसका प्रधान लक्षण है। जीवन की सहज प्रवृत्ति इन्द्रिय सुख है। काम के कारण ही मनुष्य यौन तृप्ति, संतानोत्पत्ति करके ही पितृ ऋण से मुक्त होते है। आनंद में लीन रहना ही काम है। महाभारत के शांति पर्व में कहा है –

संप्रमोदमलः कामो भूयः स्वगुणःवर्जित। महाभारत शान्ति पर्व 133/10

धर्मार्थाविरोधेन कामं सेवेत्। अर्थशास्त्र -17

अर्थात काम के वशीभूत होकर अपना धर्म नहीं छोड़ना चाहिए। आचार्य कौटिल्य ने काम को ही अंतिम पुरुषार्थ के रूप में मान्यता प्रदान की है। सो इसका पालन हेतु उपदेश दिया है। आचार्य कौटिल्य के मान्यता को देखते हुए कुछ भारतीय चिंतको ने काम को प्रथम पुरुषार्थ के रूप में स्वीकार किया है। जैसे आचार्य वात्सायन ने काम को विस्तृत अर्थ में अभिव्यक्त करते हुए कहते है की काम- सभी इन्द्रिय से प्राप्त सुख को परभाषित करते है। महर्षि मनु काम शब्द को लक्षण प्रदान करते हुए कहते है-

तमसो लक्षणं कामो - मनुस्मृति -12/38

काम तामस लक्षण युक्त है। साथ साथ काम को धर्म तथा अर्थ का स्रोत के रूप में स्वीकार किया है। काम के तीन आधार बतलाया है-

1- जैविकीय, 2- सामाजिक और 3- धार्मिक.

व्यक्ति अपनी विभिन्न इच्छाओं की संतुष्टि जैविकीय आधार पर करता हैं। इच्छाओं की तृप्ति न होने पर मानव मन में निराशा उत्पन्न होती है। सो ग्रंथियों का विकास, जैविकीय विकास, मानसिक विकास रुक जाता है। यहाँ काम ही उसे इस संत्रास से उबार पते है। जहाँ तक काम का सामाजिक आधार है यह

भी महत्वपूर्ण है। इसके माध्यम से मानव अपनी सामाजिक आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ती करता है। उदहारण के तौर पर कहा जा सकता है की विवाह के माध्यम से पति-पत्नी संतुष्टिपूर्वक प्रजनन के द्वारा पारिवारिक और सामाजिक निरन्तरता को प्रचलित या कायम रखता है। इसके साथ सामाजिक मूल्य तथा उत्तरदायित्वों का निर्वाह करता है। अन्तः में धार्मिक आधार पर काम इन्द्रिय संतुष्टि पूर्वक अपनी इच्छाओं से विरत होकर आत्मिक विकास के मार्ग में धर्म की ओर अग्रसर होता है। धीरे, धीरे ईश्वर के प्रति अनुराग वश मोक्ष मार्ग की और अग्रसर होता है। मनु महाराज कहते है –

प्रवृत्तिरेषा भूतानां निवृत्तिस्तु महाफला। मनु 05/56,

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुन्सः संगस्तेषूपजायते।

सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधो अभिजायते॥ गीता 2/62.

क्रोधात् भवति संमोह संमोहात्स्मृति विभ्रमः।

स्मृतिभ्रंशादबुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रनष्यति॥ गीता 2/63

काम-जनित इच्छाओं को दबाना नहीं चाहिए। क्योंकि ऐसा करने से क्रोध उत्पन्न होता है। क्रोध से मोह, मोह से स्मृतिभ्रम, स्मृति भ्रम से बुद्धिनाश अंत में बुद्धिनाश से सर्वनाश हो जाता है। तब तो अस्तित्वहीन होकर मूल्य -नैतिकता - धार्मिकता सभी अस्तित्वहीन हो जाता है।

D) अधिकार तथा मूल्यों का विश्लेषण –

प्रायः प्रत्येक भारतीय चिंतकों ने पुरुषार्थ को नैतिकता का आधार माना है। यहाँ पुरुषार्थ चतुष्टय के अंतर्गत धर्म- अर्थ-काम-मोक्ष -इन चारों का विश्लेषण आवश्यक है। भारतीय दर्शनों में मोक्ष के विषय में बहुत ही प्रामाणिकता के साथ व्याख्या प्राप्त होती है। जिसमें मोक्ष को साध्य या लक्ष्य के रूप में देखा गया है। यहाँ इन सभी का विश्लेषण मानवीय उद्देश्यों के सन्दर्भ में किया गया है। यद्यपि ये सभी मूल्य एक ही स्तर के नहीं है। किन्तु भारतीय चिंतकों ने धर्म निरपेक्ष तथा आध्यात्मिक मूल्यों में अंतर स्पष्ट करते हुए आध्यात्मिक मूल्यों को सर्वोच्च स्थान प्रदान किया गया है।

यहाँ यह विचारणीय है की निम्न मूल्य के अनुपालन से तात्कालिक तथा लौकिक संतुष्टि की प्राप्ति होती है और वह कुछ क्षण में ही समाप्त हो जाता है। अतएव दीर्घ सन्तोष हेतु आध्यात्मिक मूल्यों पर जोर देना आवश्यक है। आध्यात्मिक मूल्य के रूप में धर्म और मोक्ष को ही चिन्हित किया गया है। यहाँ धर्म

तथा मोक्ष की प्राप्ति की प्रणाली विश्लेषण न करते हुए मूल्यों के अनुपालन के माध्यम से मानव अधिकारों का विवेचन आलोच्य विषय है। हमें यह जानना अत्यंत आवश्यक है की समाज में, परिवार में, राष्ट्र तथा भूमण्डल में अपने कर्तव्यों को कैसे चिन्हित करेंगे। जिसके अनुपालन के माध्यम से एक सुन्दर पृथिवी का निर्माण सम्भव हो सके। यहाँ एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न उपस्थित होता है की - क्या सर्वोच्च मूल्य की प्राप्ति मनुष्य के द्वारा संभव है ? या यह केवलमात्र अवधारणा है। इसके उत्तर में सभी भारतीय चिंतक एकमत है की यह संभव है। इसे वर्तमान जीवन के प्रसार में ही प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। प्रकृति कभी भी इस आध्यात्मिक अभिलाषा से विमुख नहीं होती। सांख्य दर्शन के अनुसार प्रकृति इसमें सहायक होती है। (*सत्व-रजः-तमसां साम्यावस्था प्रकृतिः*) अतएव पुरुषार्थ मनुष्यों को परम साध्य, लक्ष्य एवं उद्देश्य है। यहाँ साध्य के साथ-साथ साधन के विषय में भी विश्लेषण किया गया है। अर्थात मनुष्य के अधिकारों को चिन्हित करते हुए अनुपालन का उपदेश किया गया है। भारतीय नीतिशास्त्र में यह जीवन दर्शन विश्व का अकेला और अनुपम जीवन दर्शन है। जहाँ जीवन के प्रति मोह तो योग भी है,बन्धन है तो मुक्ति भी है, कामनासा के साथ-साथ साधना भी है, आसक्ति के साथ-साथ त्याग भी है। यहाँ भौतिकता को प्रमुखता न देते हुए आध्यात्मिकता पर बल दिया जाता है। किन्तु भौतिकता का खंडन नहीं किया गया है। यही मानवों के लिए लाभपद है।

(III)

अन्तः में उपसंहार के रूप में कहा जा सकता है की मानव निर्माण हेतु कर्त्तव्य-कर्म से अर्जित अधिकार आपको मोक्ष या निःश्रेयस तक पहुंचा सकता है। आचार्य चाणक्य ने अपने नीतिशतक में उल्लेख किया है-

आहार-निद्रा-भय-मैथुनं च समन्यमेतत् पशुभिरनरानाम् ।

धर्मो हि तेषामधिको विशेषः धर्मेण हीना पशुभिः समाना ॥

चाणक्यनीति में इसका अभिप्राय यह है की आहार-निद्रा भय, मैथुन इत्यादि पशुओं में भी पाई जाती है, इसके अतिरिक्त धर्म ही एक ऐसा तत्व है, जो मनुष्य को पशु से पृथक करता है। ऋग्वेद में इसे ही चरितार्थ करने हेतु कहते है - ऋते ज्ञानान्न मुक्तिः ।

अर्थात ज्ञान के बिना मुक्ति प्राप्त नहीं हो सकती। परार्थ भावना ही मूल्य है, ज्ञान ही मूल्य है। इसी भावना को चरितार्थ करने के लिए कहा गया है-

समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानं मनः सहचित्तमेषाम।

चूंकि मानव मूल्यों का निर्धारण कर्त्तव्य-कर्म से होता है, यहाँ सुकरात का कथन बहुत ही सदर्थक है की -सद्गुण ही धर्म है (virtue is knowledge)।

अतःपर -

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद् दुःख भाग्भवेत्॥

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Mask Dance of Sikkim: Ethnography of the Masks and Aesthetics of Good Luck

Kunga Wangchuk Bhutia† & Subarna Bhattacharya‡

Abstract

Sikkim comprises various communities who live in peace with each other, respecting each other's faith, tradition, and culture. The Sikkimese-Buddhist people celebrate many festivals which are unique in their own ways. One of the most prominent festivals is the Kagyed[i] dance, which contributes to the rich traditions and cultural heritage of Sikkim. Kagyed is a practice dedicated to the worship of the Tantric gods of Buddhism, followed by a symbolic Mask dance signifying the end of evil for the protection of the Buddhist people. Sikkim's famous mask dance or *Chaam* (Dance) is performed on the festive occasion of the New Year to expel evil from the surroundings - society and the lands. These dances differ from one another in form and subject, but they all deal with the victory of good over bad. The history of the mask dance of Sikkim is closely linked to mysticism and theology. The mask dance portrays the story of Guru Padmasambhava who is regarded as the founder of Buddhism in Tibet and Sikkim. In this article, an attempt has been made to carry out an extensive study of the Bhutia community with a special focus on the Mask Dance of Sikkim, highlighting its history, ethnography, aesthetics**,** and significance.

Keywords*: Mask Dance, Chaam, Sikkim, Mysticism, Buddhism, Bhutia community.*

Introduction

Sikkim, being the second smallest State of India and the smallest in the Northeast, is a benchmark for tourism. Imbued with history and mysticism, concealed by verdant valleys and shielded by a cavalcade of holy peaks, the remote state is luring visitors by leaps and bounds. Its colourful festivals rightly remain its pride, and so is its cuisine delicately prepared from

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organically grown vegetables or ferns freshly plucked from the forests. Each village has trekking and biking trails leading to hidden lakes and ancient monasteries – the ideal routes to discovery for its wealth of rare flora and fauna. One could even visit monasteries, gaze at the ancient murals, or watch monks perform the mask dance to ward away evil.

Monasteries and monks play a dominant role in the social-cultural life of the Bhutias who are a part of the community that forms a chunk of the State's population. Their chief deity is the Tutelary Galaxy of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, the guardian deities, local and family deities. Most of the festivals in Sikkim are a celebration of religious events. The Bhutias observe festivals related to the New Year, Guru Padmasambhava's Birthday, and the Annual Chaam (dance) performed in the monasteries. Gutor Chaam is an annual ceremonial mask dance performed in major monasteries; the dance concludes with the burning of sacrificed objects called Torchen, signifying the burning of all evils. The Guru Drangmar Chaam, which falls in February-March, is another unique mask chaam that revolves around Nen-Seg-Phug-Sum (kill-burn-bury or triple demolition) aimed at destroying evils to bring peace in the world. The festival culminates with the unfurling of a 100 ft Ghyo-ku, a gigantic, appliqued Buddhist scroll, which shows Lord Buddha flanked by his two disciples, Sariputra[ii] and Mangalputra. This article undertakes an extensive study of the Bhutia community with a special focus on their culture and practices with a view to navigating the history, ethnography, aesthetics**,** and significance of the Mask Dance of Sikkim.

History and demography of Sikkim

The history of the state of Sikkim dates back to the fourteenth century when a prince of Tibet, Khye Bumsa,[iii] travelled to Sikkim and encountered the Lepchas respecting a divine command. This contact led Thekong Tek (Lepcha chief) and Khye Bumsa to enter a blood brotherhood treaty at Kabi Longtsok in North Sikkim. Thus, marking Lepchas and Bhutias as brothers in the territory of Sikkim.

In 1644 A. D three Lams from Tibet – Gyalwa Lhabtsun Chenpo, Kathog Rigzin Chenpo, and Ngadak Sempa Chenpo arrived at Yuksam (West Sikkim) and consecrated Phutsok (Khye Bumsa's descendant as the "Chogyal" or king of righteousness. Lhabtsun Chenpo also gave his family the title of "Namgyal" to the king. Thus, the Namgyal dynasty ruled Sikkim for around 333 years, starting with the first capital at Norbugang in Yuksam. The capital was later shifted to Rabdentse, followed by Tumlong and Gangtok. However, Sikkim faced frequent invasions from

Bhutan and Nepal, especially in the 18th century during which much of Sikkim's territories were lost. The colonial period was also not in favour of the people and the administrators of the state.

The last king, Palden Thondup Namgyal, came to the throne in 1963 and ruled until his kingdom became the 22nd State of India on May 16th, 1975. Lendup Dorje Khangsarpa of the Sikkim Congress became the first Chief Minister. He was followed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari from 1979 till 1994. He was then followed by Dr. Pawn Kumar Chamling of the Sikkim Democratic Front.

Currently, Sikkim, the 22nd State of India, is led by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha with Prem Singh Tamang as the Chief Minister. English and Hindi are widely used for official purposes; nine languages have been officially recognized by the Sikkim Government, which include Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa, Limboo, Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Mangar, Newari, and Sunuwar. Sikkim comprises various communities who live in peace with each other, respecting each other's faith, tradition, and culture. Buddhist monasteries co-exist with Churches, Mosques, temples, and gurdwaras. The dominant communities are Bhutia, Limboo, Lepcha, Sherpa, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Chettri, etc.

Historical background of the Mask dance of Sikkim

The Buddhist Sikkimese people celebrate many festivals which are unique in their own ways. The Sikkimese-Buddhist people celebrate many festivals which are unique in their own ways. One of the most prominent festivals is the Kagyed dance, which contributes to the rich traditions and cultural heritage of Sikkim. Kagyed is a practice dedicated to the worship of the Tantric gods of Buddhism, followed by a symbolic Mask dance signifying the end of evil for the protection of the Buddhist people.

Sikkim's famous mask dance or Chaam (Dance) is performed on the festive occasion of the new year to expel evil from the surroundings- society and the lands. These dances differ from one another in form and subject, but they all deal with the victory of good over bad. The history of the mask dance of Sikkim is closely linked to mysticism and theology.

The mask dance portrays the story of Guru Padmasambhava[iv] who is known as the founder of Buddhism in Tibet and Sikkim. The mask dance came into being with a cult known for dancing to expel evils, demons, and enemies. The Chaams also bring good luck for the new year. The dancers wear unique masks symbolizing animals, birds, demons, dragons, etc, and each mask has a history and folklore associated with it. The dance is performed with bright colours of dresses, with the sound of cymbals and trumpets.

The mask dance of Sikkim is closely linked to mysticism, theology, and Buddhist faith, along with pertinent facts. To know the history of the mask dance, one should know about Guru Padmasambhava, also commonly referred to as Guru Rinpoche. He is regarded as the founding father of Tibetan Buddhism. He was one of the most Indian Buddhist mystics and introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet around 749 A.D. Around the 11th century, Guru Chokyi Wangchuk, also known as Dharmashwari, a Tibetan lama, sat for meditation in order to meet and seek blessings from Guru Padmasambhava. The lama sat in meditation for days, and finally, through mystic practices, he travelled to "Sangdapheri Palace" (Heaven) wearing a black hat and riding a white horse. Here, mysticism meets religion. At a great copper hill, he met Guru Rinpoche and sought blessings from him. Upon meeting Guru Padmasambhava, the lama was asked to spread a message to the people on earth. The message was to explain to the people that they should practice the Chaam Dance from then on, as the dance would mark the destruction of evil and the victory of good over bad or dark forces.

Today, all over the world, the Chaam Dance is performed annually on the 10th month of the calendar. In India, the Chaam Dance is organized in the month of February due to weather reasons. A prayer service is offered on the 10th day of every month, as it is believed that the 10th day is the most auspicious of all, and it is on this day that Guru Rinpoche would put all his mystical abilities into practice.

Different forms of mask dance: the combination of faith and legend

The mask dance portrays the story of Guru Padmasambhava who is regarded as the founder of Buddhism in Tibet and Sikkim. After completing his spiritual mission in Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava started looking for the four major hidden lands around Tibet. The reason for searching for the hidden lands was to create spiritual resorts for the Buddhist followers. It is said that Guru Padmasambhava made his first visit to present-day North Sikkim to test an omen in the lake, after finding the holy lake in the Nort District he miraculously landed on Tashiding Hill of West Sikkim with twenty-five disciples; thereafter he addressed the entire landscape and marked the hills of the west as a centre point of the sacred land. It is said that Guru Padmasambhava explored the entire area, blessing and sanctifying lakes, hills, and caves. His footprints were found on different rocks of the land. At the same time, he exorcised several demons and nagas[v] who attempted to hinder his spiritual works.

Chaam Dance, or the mask dance, consists of 11 different types of performances by the Sikkimese lamas of various monasteries. Each performance has a different meaning and

significance, and masks appear symbolic and different from each other. These masks represent different forms of Gods and Angels.

Chamcho: The first form of Chaam dance represents the removal of the devil and evil forces that exist amongst us. This dance signifies the request to Guru Padmasambhava for protection.

Ginbap: The second form of dance signifies asking for a blessing from Guru Padmasambhava.

Sirkem: This dance represents offerings to the Gods. The lamas dance with food in their hand, and they place it in the middle. The foods commonly offered are wine, tea, fruits, and packets of chips and biscuits.

Tomnam: The most frightening performance is the Tomnam, where Lamas with wrathful and enraged masks come onto the stage and perform the dance. These masks are manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, who, in his time, would scare the evil forces by changing his personality physically and emotionally. The dance signifies scaring away and chasing the devil away.

Chok Cen: The Chok Cen dance signifies offerings to the evil spirits with optimism and hopes to make them happy and hence not disturb and bother the lives of the people. The Chok Cen dance also represents asking forgiveness to Guru Padmasambhava for all the mistakes and sins that we have done whilst living on this earth.

Ging: This specific dance performance celebrates the wisdom of Guru Rinpoche, and the actions signify the methods of "The Guru's practices" while tackling the evil forces and spreading peace amongst the people.

Kadin Chenma: Legend has it that once, five angels requested Guru Rinpoche to come down from heaven and give blessings to each and every human being on earth. Henceforth, Kadin Chenma represents the five angels, and finally, Gur Rinpoche's face is revealed in the ceremony as he steps in front of the stage, which represents his ascent from heaven.

Guru Chengay: The eight different faces of Guru Rinpoche are introduced in this act. It was understood that in the past, the great guru acquired eight manifestations. Appearing in various places and bodily forms, Guru Padmasambhava guided beings towards Enlightenment. Reaching out to them in whatever world or state of mind they might exist in.

Khandu Dengma: This mask dance represents the five angels worshipping Guru Padmasambhava. It is an act of praise by the angels.

Changba and Gyajin: The mask dance also relates to Hindu mythology, and this specific dance represents it. It celebrates 'Brahma'[vi] , who is believed to be the creator of the earth, and 'Indra'[vii].

Phardo Chaam: The last dance, which marks the end of the mask dance, is an individual dance by the eight manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava.

After each dance, the audience is blessed by the dancers, and then they return and head towards the monastery.

The mask dance: legends, rituals and symbolism

For the people of Sikkim, Guru Padmasambhava is "The patron saint of the State." Hence, the mask dance is one of the major acts and an effort by the members of the monastery and the people of the state to worship him, cherish him, seek blessings from him, and pray to him for protection from any mishaps.

Due to the mystic history and proofs of his tantric practices, the people of Sikkim especially those who follow Buddhism truly believe in the powers and supremacy of Guru Padmasambhava, therefore the mask dance does not just portray the story of his birth, his upbringing, and the skills he possessed to spread dharma but at the same time the people believe that conducting the dance and following the rituals would be an act of cleansing evil forces and spreading peace around the land of Sikkim. Therefore, the dance is conducted every year and is considered one of the biggest festivals in the calendar year for the people of Sikkim.

The author had the opportunity to go on a trip to a nearby monastery that the locals call "Hingsang Gumpa." The aim of visiting the monastery was to meet the heads of the institution and conduct an interview. Unfortunately, nobody could take out their time as an important prayer service was going on there. The lama named "Tenzing" asked the authors to revisit the next day and promised to sit for the interview then.

The next day, Tenzing lama kept his promise and had kept aside some of his schedules beforehand to just take out some time for the interview. Luckily, he was joined by his senior student, and the interview lasted for 35-40 minutes. There were problems faced whilst conducting the interview, for instance, Tenzing Lama and Sonam Lama were more comfortable speaking in the Tibetan dialect, hence another senior person had to sit alongside who acted as the translator. In this span of time, the authors discussed how the mask dance began to its

significance, the dates, and the reasons behind doing such acts every year. While working on the research, it was evident that the best place to get the answers would be a nearby monastery where the festival of Mask Dance happens annually. As such, the visit to the Migyur Dechen Laytroling Monastery, located at Gyalshing, West Sikkim, was carried out to get hold of firsthand information so that one could get a better and a detailed understanding of the dance.

The most fundamental observation of the trip to the "Hingsang Monastery" was that the legendary stories of "Padmasambhava" had been discussed with their mythological and theological meaning and significance. During the informal talks, it was revealed by the lamas why people consider the dance an act to cleanse evil forces. Every year, preparations for the dance event are taken very seriously and considered as one of the most important dates in the calendar year for the members of the monastery and the Tibetans around the world. The masks were kept by the lamas in their storeroom, and they prohibited the visitors and tourists from touching them.

Tenzing Gyamcho, aged about 67, is a teacher at Hingsang Gumpa (West Sikkim). He was with his student Sonam Gyaltsen. Both of them answered the questions rationally and simply. When asked about the meaning and the idea behind the Tibetan Mask dance, Tenzing lama narrated the story of Guru Chokyi Wngchuk and his vision and communication with Guru Padmasambhava, and how he was asked to carry out the mask dance, which would help the people receive the blessings of the Guru.

While discussing the meaning and significance of Chaam, he explained that the simple meaning of Chaam was 'Dance'. As for the materials used, they both explained that traditionally, wood was used to create the mask. Since the performance lasted for quite a while, it was difficult for Lamas to adjust the wooden mask on their head. The weight of the wood was problematic. To cope with the issue, lamas in recent times have adjusted to masks made up of Fibre as it felt more comfortable and lighter. The duration of the dance, on average, lasts for 2 hours. But there are other ceremonies together with the mask dance; hence the total duration of this celebration lasts for a day or 2 and sometimes 3, depending on the monastery.

It was stated that the mask dance ceremony is more of a celebration than a ritual and that it celebrates the victory of good over bad and also the beginning of a new year. Hence, it is an occasion for celebration. People coming to view the mask dance have one thing in mind, and that is to cherish Guru Padmasambhava and to seek blessings from him. In this process, they are blessed by the senior lamas and the mask dancers, and they are also given cho (eatables offered

to Guru Padmasambhava). It is also entertainment for the viewers as the mask dance is quite unique and different from other types of dances. As for the benefits to the performers, the basic benefit was that they represented Guru Rinpoche and his story, which was no doubt a great contribution to the Tibetan community.

Tenzing Lama explained that the masks represent the eight different manifestations of Guru Rinpoche. Each mask has its own story and significance. As for the wrathful or the scary face, it was said that not all faces are scary, and the ones that are in the face that Guru Padmasambhava would make to chase the evil forces away. As for the other masks, some look happy, some look shy, some look evil, and some look lustful. He explained that all these faces also signify the inner emotions of a person.

The Mask Dance of Sikkim is a very important event for the people of the state. It is still very active today, and the government tries its best to preserve it by showcasing it outside the state and by holding the event every year. But there is a little fear amongst the people, especially those working in the monastery, that the upcoming generation would take it for granted and would lose the essence of the culture. The reason is that the children coming out of the state have more focus on the outside world than on their own state. Parents prefer to send their kids outside and the children entering and interacting with the monastery is very limited.

During earlier times, the population involved with the monastery was large, as people were quite religious and wanted their kids to learn religion and its practices. Today, due to modernization, globalization, and better scope, parents work hard to send their children to focus on Westernized school education rather than religious scriptures. The mask dance, for instance, occurs every year in Sikkim, but few know about the significance and its history. The main reason is that people who study abroad tend to settle there; they do come back to the state occasionally to focus more on business, jobs, and money rather than the culture.

The best suggestion for such a problem, perhaps, would be to ask the government to initiate cultural chapters for the students studying in Government schools as well as private institutions. An overview of different cultural practices, their significance, and history would help the upcoming generation to be in touch with the customs and practices, which would help to solve the problems to some extent.

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[i] The Kagyed dance is a customary festival celebrated annually in Sikkim, primarily by the Tibetan Buddhist community. It is performed on the 28th and 29th day of the tenth month according to the Tibetan calendar, which typically falls in December.

[ii] Sariputra was one of the top disciples of the Buddha. He is considered the first of the Buddha's two chief male disciples.

[iii] Khye Bumsa is named in the Sikkimese migration narratives as a 13th-century prince from the Minyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet. His father migrated to the Chumbi Valley along with his family and established a kingdom. Khye Bumsa expanded it further by establishing an alliance with the Lepchas in present-day Sikkim. The Chogyal rulers of Sikkim are said to be the descendants of Khye Bumsa.

[iv] Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Riponche, was a Legendary tantric Buddhist Vajra master from Oddiyana. He fully revealed the Vajrayana in Tibet, circa the 8th to 9th centuries.

[v] Nagas: a member of a class of mythical semidivine beings, half human and half cobra.

[vi] In Hinduism, Brahma is the creator god of the universe, one of the three main deities in the Trimurti, along with Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma is often depicted with four faces and hands, representing the four Vedas, the four cardinal directions, and the four ages.

[vii] Indra is a significant figure in Hindu mythology, often referred to as the king of the Devas (gods) and the ruler of Svarga (heaven). He is the god of rain, storms, and lightning.

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Changing Dynamics of Village Festivals in Birbhum: A Focus on Monosha Puja

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Abstract

This study explores the evolving dynamics of village festivals in Birbhum, West Bengal, with a specific focus on Monosha Puja, a traditional worship of the snake goddess Monosha. Once deeply rooted in agrarian practices and local folklore, Monosha Puja served not only as a religious observance but also as a communal celebration, reinforcing social bonds. However, recent decades have witnessed significant transformations in the way this festival is perceived and performed. Through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and archival analysis, this paper examines the cultural shifts brought about by urbanization, migration, changing religious practices, and the influence of digital media. The research highlights how traditional rituals are being reinterpreted, often with reduced community involvement and increased commercialization. The role of women, who were once central to the rituals, is also being reshaped amid broader social changes. Moreover, the incorporation of modern elements such as sound systems, LED lighting, and sponsorships has altered the aesthetic and spiritual experience of the puja. Despite these changes, Monosha Puja remains a significant marker of local identity and resistance against cultural homogenization. The study underscores the tension between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, and the role of local agencies in shaping these dynamics. This research contributes to the broader discourse on the sustainability of indigenous cultural practices in a rapidly modernizing society.

Keywords: Monosha Puja, Birbhum, village festivals, cultural change, community rituals.

Introduction:

Village festivals in West Bengal serve as vibrant expressions of cultural identity, community bonding, and religious devotion. Among these, Monosha Puja — dedicated to the snake goddess Monosha — holds a special place in the rural life of Birbhum district. Traditionally

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associated with agrarian concerns, folk beliefs, and oral narratives, this puja has long been celebrated with rituals, songs, and dramas that reflect the socio-cultural ethos of the region.

However, in recent decades, the dynamics of Monosha Puja have undergone significant transformations. Influenced by urbanization, media penetration, migration, economic shifts, and changing religious sensibilities, the festival today reflects both continuity and change. Rituals once performed collectively by extended families or caste-based groups are increasingly being organized by youth clubs or sponsored by local businesses. Traditional forms of performance like Jatra are often replaced by electronic music and televised entertainment, altering the experiential nature of the festival.

This study seeks to explore these changing dynamics by focusing on Monosha Puja in selected villages of Birbhum. It aims to understand how socio-economic and cultural transitions are reshaping the celebration of the festival, what elements have persisted or disappeared, and how these changes reflect broader transformations in rural Bengal. Through a combination of ethnographic observation, interviews, and analysis of local narratives, the study attempts to document both the resilience and evolution of a deeply rooted village tradition.

Review of Literature:

The cultural and religious festivals of rural Bengal have been the subject of considerable ethnographic and sociological interest. Scholars like Nirmal Kumar Bose (1958) and D.P. Mukherjee (1950s) laid the foundational work by examining how rural rituals are intertwined with everyday life and caste hierarchies. Monosha Puja, dedicated to the snake goddess, has historically been seen as a localized, folk-religious practice—predominantly celebrated by lower caste and tribal communities (Bandyopadhyay, 1993).

Studies by scholars such as Sumanta Banerjee (2002) have emphasized the syncretic nature of Bengal's folk deities, including Monosha, and their resistance to Sanskritization. Further research by Tapati Guha-Thakurta (2004) has explored how popular religious art and ritual forms evolve with changing socio-economic conditions. These works indicate that rural festivals are not static; rather, they absorb influences from media, urbanization, and migration.

In the context of Birbhum, a district known for its rich folk traditions and Baul-Fakir culture, recent research (Chatterjee, 2010) suggests that religious festivals are undergoing significant transformation due to political patronage, tourism, and the spread of digital technologies. However, few studies have focused exclusively on Monosha Puja in this region.

Additionally, gendered dimensions of Monosha worship—often led by women or involving female-centric narratives—have been explored in the work of Rituparna Roy (2015), who links ritual performance to women's agency in rural settings. Despite these contributions, the micro-level changes in ritual practice, community participation, and symbolism in Monosha Puja due to modernization remain under-researched.

This review underscores the need to document and analyze the evolving dynamics of Monosha Puja in Birbhum, particularly through the lens of cultural continuity, change, and identity in the face of socio-economic transition.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the traditional practices and rituals associated with Monosha Puja in Birbhum villages.

2. To analyze the socio-cultural changes affecting the observance of Monosha Puja over recent decades.

3. To explore the role of modern influences such as media, urbanization, and migration on the festival's format and participation.

4. To assess the changing roles of different community members (e.g., priests, women, youth) in organizing and performing the puja.

5. To document the economic impact and commercialization trends related to the celebration of Monosha Puja in village settings.

Need for the Study

Village festivals like Monosha Puja in Birbhum, West Bengal, have traditionally been integral to the cultural identity, social cohesion, and religious practices of rural communities. However, with increasing urbanization, exposure to modernity, changes in economic structures, and the influence of digital media, the form and function of these festivals are undergoing significant transformation. This study is necessary to:

1. Document Cultural Shifts: There is an urgent need to capture the evolving practices, rituals, and community participation associated with Monosha Puja, especially as traditional knowledge systems risk being lost.

2. Understand Socio-Economic Impacts: Examining how socio-economic changes are influencing festival organization, sponsorship, and participation can offer insights into the broader transitions within rural society.

3. Preserve Intangible Heritage: The study serves as a means to preserve and archive elements of intangible cultural heritage that may not survive in their original forms due to modernization and generational shifts.

4. Inform Policy and Cultural Preservation: Insights from the study could inform cultural policies and local governance strategies aimed at preserving rural traditions while accommodating change.

5. Contribute to Academic Discourse: There is a gap in region-specific, ethnographic, and interdisciplinary studies focusing on lesser-documented village festivals like Monosha Puja in Birbhum. This research would contribute valuable primary data to the fields of anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies.

Limitations:

1. The study may focus on only a few villages in Birbhum, which might not represent the entire district or region.

2. Much of the information about traditional practices may come from oral histories, which can be subjective, fragmented, or influenced by memory bias.

3. Observations may be based on a single year's festival, which might not capture long-term trends or exceptional events like political unrest or pandemics.

4. Researchers might face difficulties in interpreting rituals and symbolism without imposing external or academic frameworks, which can lead to misrepresentation.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the changing dynamics of Monosha Puja in the villages of Birbhum district, West Bengal. The research methodology is designed to capture both historical transitions and contemporary practices through ethnographic engagement and participatory observation.

1. Research Design:

A case study method was used to investigate Monosha Puja in selected villages of Birbhum. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and economic transformations associated with the festival.

2. Site Selection:

Three villages—representative of different socio-economic and cultural profiles—were selected purposively within the Birbhum district. Criteria for selection included the historical continuity of Monosha Puja, community participation, and varying degrees of urban influence.

3. Data Collection Methods:

Field Observation: Extended periods of observation were conducted during the Monosha Puja festivities to document rituals, performances, spatial arrangements, and participation.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants such as local priests, elderly villagers, performers (like singers and drummers), women devotees, and festival organizers.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were held with different community groups to understand intergenerational perceptions and changes in festival practices.

Archival Research: Local records, photographs, and previous documentation (if any) were reviewed to understand the historical context of the festival.

4. Data Analysis

The data was thematically analyzed to trace continuities and changes over time. Particular attention was paid to shifts in sponsorship patterns, gender roles, religious symbolism, and the impact of media and technology.

5. Ethical Considerations:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained as per ethical research standards.

Discussion:

The changing dynamics of village festivals in Birbhum, particularly Monosha Puja, reflect broader shifts in rural Bengal's cultural, social, and economic landscape. Traditionally celebrated

with great reverence, Monosha Puja in Birbhum — an annual worship of the serpent goddess Monosha — has evolved in several ways over the years. These changes are influenced by various factors such as urbanization, modernization, and the infiltration of new cultural trends. Here are some key aspects to explore in a discussion about this topic:

Transformation of Rituals and Practices

Traditional Customs: In the past, the rituals associated with Monosha Puja were deeply rooted in local customs, often reflecting the agricultural life of the community. The festival would involve offerings of milk, fruits, and sweets to the goddess, performed at homes or in specific community locations like temples or by riversides. The ritual of snake worship had a symbolic connection to fertility, agriculture, and the environment.

Modern Influence: With the growth of urban influences, there has been a shift toward more standardized forms of worship. In many places, large pandals (temporary structures) are set up with elaborate decorations, and the focus is more on the social and cultural aspects of the event, including music, dance, and community gatherings. These modifications sometimes dilute the original religious significance of the festival.

Role of Technology and Media

Technology in Festivals: The rise of technology has affected the way Monosha Puja is celebrated. The use of sound systems, LED lights, and video projections has transformed the visual and auditory experience of the festival. Social media platforms also play a major role in documenting and sharing festival celebrations, which spreads awareness but can also lead to commercialization and the loss of localized traditions.

Media Representation: Over time, media, including films and television, have popularized certain aspects of the festival, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes or offering new interpretations of the cultural practices. This external influence can alter the perception and experience of Monosha Puja among younger generations.

Economic Impact

Local Economy: Traditionally, Monosha Puja was a time when villagers would come together, reinforcing community bonds. However, today, the economic aspects of the festival are much more commercialized. From the sale of puja materials to local vendors selling food and

souvenirs, the festival generates revenue for businesses, particularly in rural areas. Large-scale celebrations also attract tourism, further driving the local economy.

Cost and Accessibility: On the flip side, the commercialization of the festival has made it expensive for some communities, leading to a divide where only wealthier families or villages can afford grand celebrations. This can result in less inclusive, more competitive celebrations, where the emphasis shifts from religious devotion to social status and display.

Shifts in Social Structure and Participation

Role of Women and Community Involvement: Historically, women played a central role in Monosha Puja, especially in village settings where they would perform the rituals at home. Over time, however, with the increasing participation of men and the involvement of broader community groups, the family-centric nature of the festival has shifted. While some may argue this is a positive step towards inclusivity, others feel it leads to a loss of traditional values and the intimate nature of the celebration.

Impact of Migration: Many young people from rural areas migrate to cities for work or education, which leads to a reduction in active participation in local festivals like Monosha Puja. Those who return for the festival bring with them influences from urban life, sometimes leading to a blend of traditional and modern practices.

Cultural and Religious Significance

Preserving Tradition vs. Adapting to Change: One of the biggest challenges facing Monosha Puja and similar festivals is the balance between preserving traditional rituals and adapting to the needs and tastes of modern society. While some view the changes as necessary for the survival of the festival, others feel that the essence of the worship and cultural heritage is being lost. The tension between tradition and modernity is particularly evident when it comes to rituals and the overall spiritual atmosphere of the event.

Integration with Other Festivals: In some areas, Monosha Puja has started to merge with other festivals or has been incorporated into larger, multi-event celebrations. This blending can sometimes dilute the distinct identity of the festival, but can also promote a sense of unity among different communities.

Cultural Revival Efforts

Grassroots Movements: Amidst the shifts in how Monosha Puja is celebrated, there have been efforts at the grassroots levels to preserve and revitalize the traditional practices. Cultural organizations, local temples, and community leaders are working to keep the authentic rituals alive while finding ways to make the festival more relevant to younger generations. These efforts may include organizing educational programs, promoting traditional music and dance, and encouraging a return to simpler, more meaningful celebrations.

Conclusion:

The changing dynamics of village festivals in Birbhum, with a particular focus on Monosha Puja, reflect broader socio-cultural and economic transformations in the region. Over the years, Monosha Puja, traditionally a rural festival, has experienced shifts in its observance and significance due to factors such as urbanization, modernization, and the influence of global cultural trends.

In many villages, the traditional rituals and community participation have evolved, with increasing commercialization, the incorporation of new forms of entertainment, and the influence of external religious and cultural practices. Despite these changes, Monosha Puja continues to serve as an important occasion for community bonding, religious devotion, and the reinforcement of local identity.

Furthermore, while some aspects of the festival have become more mainstream, leading to concerns over the loss of authenticity, there is also a growing movement to preserve and promote the traditional forms of celebration. Local efforts to revive ancient practices, highlight folk art, and foster an atmosphere of unity and cultural pride have contributed to maintaining the essence of the festival.

In conclusion, Monosha Puja in Birbhum stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of rural traditions in the face of modern challenges. The ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity in the festival's observance highlights the complex cultural evolution that continues to shape rural life in the region.

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Trade and Commerce between Agra and Bengal during the Mughal Period: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

During the Mughal era, the commercial linkage between Agra, the imperial capital, and Bengal, a major economic hub in eastern India, played a vital role in shaping the empire's internal trade dynamics. This study traces the evolution of these trade relations from the reign of Akbar through Jahangir's period, emphasizing the exchange of prominent goods such as textiles, spices, saltpeter, and precious metals. It explores how the development of road networks, riverine routes, and caravanserais under Mughal patronage facilitated sustained economic interaction between the two regions. Drawing upon contemporary sources—including imperial decrees (*farmāns*), European travel narratives, and authoritative chronicles like the *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*—the paper contextualizes these commercial exchanges within the broader framework of Mughal governance. Special attention is given to administrative measures such as Akbar's regulatory reforms and Jahangir's diplomatic engagements, both of which significantly influenced the flow of goods and merchants. The analysis concludes by assessing the enduring economic impact of Agra-Bengal trade, particularly in relation to the empire's fiscal strength and its evolving interactions with European trading companies.

Keywords: Trade, commerce, Agra, Bengal, Commodities

1. Introduction

The Mughal era, spanning from the early 16th century to the mid-18th century, marked a transformative period in the economic history of the Indian subcontinent. The empire witnessed remarkable expansion in agriculture, artisanal production, and trade under a centralized administrative system that promoted long-distance commerce and regional interconnectivity. Among the various regional networks that sustained the empire's economy, the

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commercial linkage between Agra—the imperial capital—and Bengal—a province of immense agrarian and commercial wealth—stood out as particularly crucial. This connection not only facilitated the internal cohesion of the Mughal economy but also positioned Bengal as a significant player in the emerging global trade networks of the early modern world.

Agra, as the heart of the Mughal administrative and political machinery, depended heavily on a steady influx of essential and luxury commodities from other parts of the empire to sustain its courtly life, urban population, and military apparatus. Bengal, with its fertile deltaic landscape and strategic coastal access, emerged as a critical supplier of these goods. The province was especially noted for its abundant production of rice, muslin, silk, indigo, and saltpetre. According to Habib (1982), Bengal's agricultural surplus and artisanal specializations enabled it to meet the high demands of both domestic consumption and export markets. Saltpetre, in particular, held military significance due to its role in gunpowder production, making Bengal strategically important to the Mughal military economy (Richards, 1993).

The reign of Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) was instrumental in laying the foundations for a more integrated imperial economy. Akbar introduced a series of fiscal reforms, most notably the *zabt* system, which standardized revenue assessments based on crop yields and market rates. These policies aimed not only at maximizing state revenue but also at integrating agrarian production with market forces (Habib, 1982). The regularization of land revenue and improvements in transport infrastructure, such as the expansion of road networks and riverine transport, greatly enhanced the efficiency of trade between provinces. The Yamuna-Ganges river system facilitated the movement of goods from the interior to eastern markets, linking Agra with Bengal through both land and water routes (Ali, 2006).

Bengal's coastal location further amplified its role as a commercial hub. From the late 16th century onward, the region became increasingly integrated into the global economy through interactions with European trading companies. The Portuguese were the earliest European entrants, establishing trading posts and dominating maritime trade until the arrival of the Dutch and English in the early 17th century. These European powers were particularly attracted to Bengal's fine cotton textiles and saltpetre, which were in high demand in Europe and Southeast Asia (Chaudhuri, 1978). The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the English East India Company established factories in key Bengal port towns such as Hooghly and Balasore, facilitating the export of local goods in exchange for bullion, which further stimulated the regional economy (Subrahmanyam, 1990).

Moreover, the growing presence of European merchants introduced new economic dynamics. While the Mughals initially viewed these powers as useful partners in external trade, the increasing volume of European commerce began to alter traditional trade patterns. Bengal's integration into transoceanic trade circuits contributed to the monetization of its economy and the growth of port cities that served as nodes in a complex commercial network extending from South Asia to Europe, East Africa, and Southeast Asia (Ray, 1994). The commercial vibrancy of Bengal also attracted merchants from across the Islamic world, including Persians, Armenians, and Central Asians, contributing to the cosmopolitan character of the province's urban centres.

The Agra-Bengal trade route thus exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between the political center and a key economic periphery in the Mughal system. Goods such as textiles, grains, spices, and saltpetre flowed from Bengal to Agra, while bullion, official mandates, and courtly demands traveled in the opposite direction. These exchanges helped maintain the cohesion of the Mughal Empire and enabled its integration into global markets. The dynamism of Bengal, coupled with the administrative foresight of rulers like Akbar, played a foundational role in shaping the economic resilience and sophistication of the Mughal state.

In conclusion, the commercial interdependence between Agra and Bengal during the Mughal period was not only a vital component of the empire's internal economy but also a window into the subcontinent's engagement with early modern global trade. The flow of goods, people, and ideas along this route underscores the economic sophistication of the Mughal Empire and the strategic role of Bengal in sustaining its prosperity.

2. Historical Background of Trade between Agra and Bengal

2.1 Akbar's Economic Reforms

The reign of Akbar played a crucial role in developing the commercial infrastructure that supported trade between Agra and Bengal. As documented in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* (1595), Akbar implemented a range of market regulations aimed at stabilizing prices and promoting the smooth circulation of goods across the empire. One of his most significant infrastructural contributions was the expansion and maintenance of the Grand Trunk Road, which served as a vital trade corridor connecting Agra to Bengal and other important regions. Abul Fazl emphasized the strategic importance of this thoroughfare, noting that it "links the distant parts of Hindustan and strengthens the empire's cohesion and prosperity" (*Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. II). This

well-connected route not only facilitated overland commerce but also reinforced administrative integration across the vast Mughal territory.

2.2 *Expansion of Trade under Jahangir and Shah Jahan*

Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) built upon the commercial and administrative foundations laid by his predecessor, continuing efforts to strengthen trade infrastructure. In his memoir, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (1609), he underscored the necessity of securing trade routes and protecting merchants, recognizing commerce as vital to the empire's prosperity. Jahangir also pursued diplomatic engagement with European powers, especially the Portuguese, who had already established a presence in Bengal's coastal zones. These interactions facilitated the steady supply of luxury items to the Mughal court. The subsequent reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658) saw further economic expansion in Bengal, where commodities such as silk, muslin, and indigo emerged as major exports, not only feeding demand in Agra but also reaching broader inland and international markets.

2.3Impact of Aurangzeb's Policies

The reign of Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) represented both the height and the beginning of a decline in the Mughal Empire's economic stability. Despite the enduring strength of trade between Agra and Bengal, the pressures of continuous military campaigns and the complexities of governing an expansive empire gradually undermined fiscal health. Nevertheless, the robust commercial infrastructure and trade routes developed under previous emperors continued to facilitate economic activity, allowing key exchanges between the two regions to persist even amid growing administrative and political challenges.

3. Trade Routes and Infrastructure

3.1 Role of the Grand Trunk Road

The Grand Trunk Road (GTR) was a critical artery of commerce and administration during the Mughal period, connecting the imperial capital of Agra with the economically vibrant province of Bengal. Originally established by Sher Shah Suri in the 16th century, the GTR was significantly upgraded under Emperor Akbar, who understood the strategic importance of a well-maintained overland route spanning from Kabul in the west to Sonargaon in Bengal. This road facilitated not only the efficient movement of troops and officials but also enabled the

transport of essential goods such as textiles, grains, saltpetre, and gemstones, which were fundamental to the Mughal economy (Farooqui, 2013; Habib, 1982).

According to Abul Fazl in the Ain-i-Akbari (1595), Akbar invested in infrastructure along the route, including caravanserais (rest houses), wells, and milestones (kos minars) to ensure safe and reliable travel for merchants and travelers. These amenities reduced the risks of long-distance trade and increased economic activity along the corridor (Saran, 1968). The Ain-i-Akbari notes Akbar's personal supervision in ensuring that trade routes remained secure and functional, thus fostering internal integration of distant provinces such as Bengal (Abul Fazl, 1595/1949).

Bengal, known for its fertile lands and artisanal products, supplied key commodities like rice, cotton textiles, and saltpetre—the latter being vital for gunpowder production. These goods were transported via the GTR to Agra and other urban centres, sustaining both the imperial court and commercial hubs (Chaudhuri, 1985; Prakash, 1985). European travelers like François Bernier and Peter Mundy observed the bustling trade and well-managed road systems, describing them as signs of a prosperous and administratively capable empire (Bernier, 1670/1994; Mundy, 1632/1914).

Moreover, the GTR enhanced inter-regional connectivity, supporting not only domestic trade but also the export-oriented economy of Bengal, which attracted Portuguese, Dutch, and English merchants (Eaton, 1993; Alam & Subrahmanyam, 2012). By enabling smoother overland transport, the Mughals effectively linked inland production zones with coastal export centres, embedding Bengal firmly into the empire's broader political economy.

In conclusion, the Grand Trunk Road epitomized the Mughal Empire's vision of a cohesive and economically interconnected realm, where the development of infrastructure supported both administrative effectiveness and commercial success.

3.2 Riverine Systems of Bengal

Bengal's extensive river network, especially the Ganges and Brahmaputra, played a critical role in the movement of goods across the Mughal Empire. These waterways linked the interior regions of Bengal with coastal trading centres, enabling the efficient transport of commodities to Agra and other key destinations. The rivers functioned as vital commercial channels, supporting both domestic and long-distance trade. The 17th-century French traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier observed, "The rivers of Bengal are like highways for its commerce, carrying goods to the

farthest reaches of Hindustan" (Tavernier, 1676). This natural infrastructure complemented overland routes and enhanced Bengal's economic integration with the broader imperial economy.

3.3 Security and Infrastructure

The Mughal administration placed great emphasis on safeguarding trade routes, recognizing the importance of secure commerce to the empire's prosperity. The French traveler François Bernier, who journeyed through India in the 17th century, remarked that "caravans along the Mughal roads were rarely troubled by robbers, owing to the imperial protection that ensured the safety of merchants" (Bernier, 1670). This high level of security enabled traders to move valuable goods—including spices, textiles, and precious stones—across long distances with confidence, thereby sustaining robust commercial activity throughout the empire.

4. Major Commodities Traded

4.1 Textiles (Muslin and Silk)

Bengal gained widespread acclaim for its exquisite muslin and silk, which were highly sought after both by the Mughal court and European merchants. The region's textiles were celebrated for their exceptional quality, intricate designs, and fine craftsmanship. As recorded in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Bengal stood as a major hub for textile production, employing thousands of skilled weavers in the industry. Muslin, in particular, became one of the most prized exports to Agra, where it was used to craft luxurious garments for the Mughal elite, symbolizing the region's importance in the empire's economic and cultural fabric.

4.2 Spices and Grains

Bengal's rich and fertile land was a major source of various spices, including pepper, cardamom, and cloves, which were transported to Agra and other regions of the Mughal Empire. In addition to these valuable spices, rice and wheat were crucial agricultural exports that flowed from Bengal to sustain the rest of the empire. Edward Terry, an English traveler in the 17th century, observed that "The abundance of rice and other grains in Bengal feeds much of India, and its wealth lies in its soil" (Terry, 1655). This agricultural bounty was central to Bengal's economic significance within the Mughal trade network.

4.3 Saltpeter

Saltpeter, a crucial ingredient in the production of gunpowder, was one of Bengal's most significant exports. Given the Mughal military's heavy dependence on gunpowder for its campaigns, saltpeter became a strategic resource for the empire. It was transported from Bengal to Agra, where it was refined and distributed to the Mughal forces. The English traveler Peter Mundy noted, "Bengal's saltpeter is of the highest quality, and it is highly coveted by the Mughal armies" (Mundy, 1632). This resource played a critical role in sustaining the military strength of the Mughal Empire.

4.4 Precious Stones and Metals

Bengal was also a key hub for the trade of precious stones and metals. Diamonds, rubies, and pearls were imported through Bengal's ports from Southeast Asia and then traded to the Mughal court in Agra. These luxurious items were in high demand among the Mughal elite, and their desire for such treasures fuelled extensive trade routes connecting Agra and Bengal. The *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* recounts numerous instances where merchants presented jewels from Bengal to Emperor Jahangir, highlighting the region's significance in the luxury goods trade.

5. Mughal Administrative Policies and Their Impact on Trade

5.1 Akbar's Market Reforms

Akbar introduced a series of market reforms that greatly enhanced trade between Bengal and Agra. Among the most important of these reforms was the standardization of weights and measures, which helped eliminate inconsistencies in trade practices across the empire. As Abul Fazl observed in the *Ain-i-Akbari* (Vol. II), "The emperor's market reforms have brought stability to commerce, allowing traders from all corners of the empire to transact fairly." This systematization played a vital role in facilitating smoother and more equitable trade, benefiting merchants and consumers alike.

5.2 Taxation and Tariffs

The taxation system of the Mughal Empire was strategically designed to support trade while ensuring that the state benefited from the wealth generated through commerce. Bengal's abundant agricultural output and textile production served as key sources of revenue for the empire. The Zamindari system allowed local landholders, or zamindars, to collect taxes on behalf of the imperial administration, with a substantial portion of this revenue coming from trade

activities. In Agra, customs duties were imposed on goods entering the city, ensuring that the state received a share of the profits generated by the region's bustling commerce.

5.3 Role of the Karkhanas

The Karkhanas (royal workshops) in Agra played a pivotal role in the production and distribution of luxury goods within the Mughal Empire. These workshops were responsible for creating high-value items such as textiles, jewelry, and other fine products, which were traded across the empire. As described in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (1609), "The Karkhanas of Agra are renowned for their craftsmanship, and the goods produced here are sought after in every corner of Hindustan." The exceptional quality of these products contributed significantly to Agra's status as a major center of Mughal luxury trade.

6. European Influence on Bengal-Agra Trade

6.1 Portuguese and Dutch Traders

The arrival of European traders in Bengal during the Mughal period introduced a new dimension to the region's commerce. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish a presence in Bengal, setting up trading posts along the coastline. By the early 17th century, Dutch traders had also arrived, establishing themselves in the Hooghly district. According to *The Dutch East India Company in Bengal* (Prakash, 1985), Dutch merchants exchanged goods such as silk, muslin, and spices with the Mughal court, frequently using Agra as a key transit point for European goods on their way to and from the empire.

6.2 British East India Company's Entry

By the mid-17th century, the British East India Company had also begun to establish a foothold in Bengal. The company's officials quickly recognized the immense value of Bengal's textiles and other commodities, setting up a network of trade routes linking Bengal to their factories in Agra and other parts of India. William Finch, an early British traveler, remarked, "The riches of Bengal are beyond measure, and the English company seeks to exploit this wealth for the benefit of the Crown" (Finch, 1622). This marked the beginning of significant British commercial influence in the region, with the company focusing on leveraging Bengal's resources for economic gain.

7. Conclusion

The trade connections between Agra and Bengal were not merely a pillar of the Mughal Empire's prosperity but also a testament to the empire's economic ingenuity. Bengal's wealth, born from its fertile lands, thriving textile industry, and pivotal position as a gateway to Southeast Asia, enriched the Mughal economy in countless ways. The empire's visionary infrastructure, including the Grand Trunk Road and Bengal's vast river systems, ensured the seamless movement of goods across great distances. Under the astute leadership of Akbar and Jahangir, the Mughal administrative policies fostered a stable environment for trade to flourish. The entry of European traders further infused a global dimension into this exchange, amplifying the empire's wealth and influence. While the empire's later years were marred by challenges, the legacy of the Bengal-Agra trade endured, continuing to shape the region's economic landscape long after the decline of the Mughal reign.

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Institutional Support and Assistance to the MSME Sector through the Lens of the Sports Goods Industry

Divya Mahajan†

Abstract

The awareness level regarding various Institutions/Organisations/ Agencies and Industry Associations that Provide Support and Assistance to the MSME Sector, vis-à-vis the age variable, has been undertaken for the present study. To deal with the issue of Government Policy Changes and Support Measures for the MSME Sector, the study identified age as a prominent variable, based on the review of literature. The focus of the present study will remain on age parameters vis-à-vis its relationship with different aspects of the MSMEs.

Keywords: MSME, Sport Goods Industry, Institutional support, Consulting companies

Introduction

The role of the MSMEs in shaping the future of an economy is quite influential. With the advancements in the business entrepreneurial sector, it becomes all the more crucial for the Governments to assist MSMEs on the path of progress. With MSMEs playing an integral part in India's economic growth, providing a crucial link in the supply chain, and fostering innovation, it is essential to analyse the role of Government schemes that have been framed from time to time to meet such advancements. Such analysis not only aids in providing financial assistance to them but also caters to their requirements with the changing dynamics of the global stature. With government initiatives like the *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, MSMEs are being equipped to compete globally. However, addressing challenges related to financing, technology, and skill development is essential for their sustained growth.

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These MSMEs are defined by their investment in plant and machinery and their annual turnover. MSMEs play a crucial role in India's economy, contributing significantly to employment, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and exports, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. They are also key to entrepreneurship development and innovation. Understanding the nuances between MSMEs can therefore help policymakers craft more targeted and effective support measures for the various other stakeholders that play a pivotal role in its successful implementation. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is a vital contributor to the Indian economy, playing a crucial role in manufacturing and exports. However, recent data from the Indian government indicates a concerning trend. The Gross Value Added by MSMEs in India's GDP has decreased from 30.5% in 2019-20 to 29.2% in 2021-22, and the share of MSME-specified products in All-India Exports has dropped from 49.4% in 2020-21 to 43.6% in 2022-23(Ministry of MSME,2023-24). The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) has suggested reforms in national and state policies across sectors to enhance the ease of doing business for small enterprises and build a globally competitive micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) ecosystem in the country (*Economic Times*, 2025).

India's MSME sector significantly impacts the GDP growth and expansion in per capita income. (Satsangi, Raghuwanshi, Singhal, & others, et.al, 2025). The economic significance of MSMEs is clearly evident from their contribution to GDP, Employment generation, export share, etc. Therefore, MSMEs boost the engine of economic growth in both developed as well as developing economies. Hence, it becomes very important for the Government initiatives to bolster the MSME sector by providing them with institutional support to MSMEs. The Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (M/o MSME) is an apex body that is responsible for formulating and implementing policies and programs for MSME development. It oversees a range of schemes aimed at financial assistance, skill development, infrastructure support, and market promotion. (Ganguly, et.al, 2023). This act blanketed the meaning of micro, small, and medium-sized agencies. With the current scenario that talks about fintech, sustainability, and global transformations, MSMEs have emerged as a highly vibrant and dynamic sector for young business minds to transform their business ideas into reality by simultaneously balancing the regional imbalances through their esteemed contribution in the fields of manufacturing, production, and export (Rathore, & Mathur, 2019). Therefore, with the assistance of the Government support schemes and initiatives, the journey of contributing towards a nation's economic growth could be achieved constructively.

In light of these policy changes, we find that the major development in the domain of MSMEs is the development of the MSMED ACT, 2006. This Act has created new opportunities for the growth of MSMEs at the National and State levels. Therefore, more emphasis has been given to this Act.

Review of literature

The review of relevant literature has been conducted to take into account all the pertinent studies conducted in the past to bring out the necessary research gaps.

Farajollahzadeh, & others (2016) point out the growth and contributions made by the MSMEs by comparing them with other industrial sectors and their yearly GDP contributions. They also share data related to the export destination where the MSMEs' products have their destinations. This study also states that the Government's "Make in India" program has contributed constructively towards achieving skill formation and channelising innovation.

Ashoka, M. L., et al. (2019) envisaged the role of SIDBI on 400 respondents in the Karnataka region and stipulated that SIDBI plays an important role in assisting the MSME sector in terms of providing financial assistance. Also, there are many financial and non-financial schemes being floated by the Government to assist and support entrepreneurs.

Rathore, R., & Mathur, A. (2019) show that there is the highest number of micro-enterprises in the manufacturing sector. It explains that various schemes, such as Capital subsidy schemes, National equity fund schemes, Cluster development programmes, etc., have helped in the growth and development of the MSME sector.

Srivastava, S. (2022) discusses that there is a need to create awareness about the Government schemes that have been framed to assist the MSME sector. It also brings to notice that even though the schemes are availed by the entrepreneurs, a multi-fold aspect lags behind because of the scarcity of skilled workforce with the knowledge of technological advancements.

Ganguly, S. (2023) insightfully depicts the evolution of MSMEs with respect to the changing dynamics of industrial setup. From developing itself into a self-reliant industry to transformational sustainable practices, it covers all essential aspects related to MSMEs in the present times. It also aids in discussing the various challenges faced by MSMEs and the overview of the various government support schemes in the West Bengal region of India.

Kadaba, & others (2023) discuss the aspect of financial inclusion in the era of digital innovation through the credit accessibility schemes launched by the Government of India. They state that economic growth through the various digital schemes leads to streamlining the process of e-commerce.

Singh, S. (2024) sheds light on the evolution of MSMEs and also on the various statutory bodies that come under the Ministry of MSMEs. It personifies the potential of MSMEs in a way that attracted the Government of India's keen interest in taking it to new heights with the establishment of various statutory as well as non-statutory bodies under its aegis.

Singh, R. (2024) gives qualitative insights into the various technological upgradations along with the much-needed infrastructural facilities that support not just the MSME workforce but also the artisans. It also states the financial infusions made by the Government for the growth of MSMEs.

Bansal, S., & Yadav, S. (2025) reflect upon the implementation of the government schemes through the bank participation helps in overcoming the gaps faced by the MSME sector. They also explain that certain improvements are required to tap the opportunities of the changing global paradigm.

Bhajantri, H. (2025) shares that the Government should emerge from the front foot so that the benefits of its schemes are awarded to the actual beneficiaries having legitimate enterprises in the MSME sector. The main causes of the lack of awareness are also discussed under it, which aids in a better understanding of the pitfalls and Challenges faced by the MSME sector.

Govindasamy, S., & Nagarajan, S. (2025) carefully analyse the impact of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana. They state that this scheme has strengthened financial inclusion in the MSME sector. This has further improved the job creation and boosted the economic growth of the country.

Nambiar, J. (2025) explains the gaps bridged by the PMMY between the classic banking channels and small enterprises, giving a boost to the rural and urban domains in terms of opportunities with equitable distribution. But it also mentions that the role of a reliable banking partner is required for its successful implementation to avoid fraud.

Satsangi, Raghuwanshi, & others. (2025) discuss the significance of the three key schemes-MUDRA, Stand-up India, and Startup India, with their impact on the overall MSME sector. It

also shares insights on how the assistance offered by these schemes could lead to sustained economic growth with informed decision-making.

Research Methodology

In order to collect data, 107 sports goods enterprises were interviewed personally. The data so collected was analysed using descriptive analysis. The percentage and frequency method was used to check the awareness level amongst respondents. The data was further analysed in order to check the association of the age of the Enterprises vis-a-vis the Awareness/ Perception level concerning organisational support available to MSMEs.

1. Awareness level regarding various Financial Institutions that provide support and assistance to the MSME Sector

Many organisations support MSMEs in India. Awareness Levels about various Organisations like National Government, State Government, Local Administration, Large Foreign Companies, Association of Entrepreneurs, Insurance Companies, International Donors, Consulting Companies and Agencies, Banks, and Chambers of Commerce were sought as Yes, coded as 1, and No, coded as 0. The responses are presented in the table1 which shows the results of those enterprises that were aware of the agencies.

Table 1: Organisations that support the MSMEs

Sl. No.	Organisations	Frequency	Percentage
i.	National Government	42	39.25
ii.	State Government	12	11.21
iii.	Local Administration	5	4.67
iv.	Large Foreign companies	6	5.60
v.	Association of Entrepreneurs	41	38.31
vi.	Insurance companies	10	9.34
vii.	International Donors	3	2.80

viii.	Consulting Companies and Agencies	6	5.60
ix.	Banks	21	19.62
x.	Chamber of Commerce	19	17.75

Source: Compiled by researcher from primary data.

The data relating to Organisational support to the MSMEs in India is presented in Table 1. It shows the frequency and percentage of those Enterprises that believe that Organisational support is available for Indian MSMEs.

The analysis of the data reveals that only 39.25 percent of the respondents stated that the National Government supports MSMEs. A mere 11.21 percent of the respondents stated that the state government supports the MSMEs. Further, a mere 4.7 percent of the respondents stated that local governments support MSMEs. Only 5.60 percent of the total percentage of respondents stated that Large Foreign Companies provide support to MSMEs. A mere 38.31 percent of the respondents believed that the Association of Entrepreneurs provides support to MSMEs. Further, only 9.34 percent of the total respondents stated that insurance companies provide support to MSMEs. Only 2.80 percent of Entrepreneurs considered International Donors as helpful. Further, 5.60 percent of the respondents opined that Consulting Companies and Agencies help and support MSMEs. Only 19.62 percent of the respondents stated that banks provide support and help to MSMEs. Lastly, 17.75 percent of the respondents stated that the Chamber of Commerce helps and supports the MSMEs.

2. Association between the Age of the Enterprises and Awareness/ Perception level regarding Organisational support available to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

The Awareness level of the Entrepreneurs was checked by associating them with the Enterprise's age. The purpose of this analysis is to analyse the policy changes and support measures provided to the MSME sector by various Organisations. The following hypotheses have been set to conduct the study:

H_0 : There is no significant association between enterprises' age and their awareness level about organisations that provide assistance to the MSME sector.

H_1 : There is a significant association between enterprises' age and their awareness level about organisations that provide assistance to the MSME sector.

The Null and Alternate hypotheses have been tested on various Organisations like the National Government, State Government, Local Administration, Large Foreign Companies, Association of Entrepreneurs, Insurance Companies, International Donors, Consulting Companies and Agencies, Banks, and the Chamber of Commerce. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Association between Enterprises' Age and Awareness/ Perception about Organisations that support MSMEs

Organisations	Age Intervals										Pearson χ^2				H_0
	I (n=23)		II (n=24)		III (n=23)		IV(n=37)		Total (107)		χ^2 val. DF=3	Sig. val.	Φ_c	r_s	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes					
National Government	18 (78.30)	5 (21.70)	11 (45.80)	13 (54.20)	11 (47.80)	12 (52.20)	25 (67.60)	12 (32.40)	65 (60.70)	42 (39.30)	7.530	0.057	0.265	0.019	Accepted
State Government	22 (95.70)	1 (4.30)	20 (83.30)	4 (16.70)	19 (82.60)	4 (17.40)	34 (91.90)	3 (8.10)	95 (88.80)	12 (11.20)	3.045	0.385	0.169	0.009	Accepted
Local Administration	22 (95.70)	1 (4.30)	22 (91.70)	2 (8.30)	21 (91.30)	2 (8.70)	37 (100)	0 (0.00)	102 (95.30)	5 (4.70)	3.377	0.337	0.178	-0.103	Accepted
Large Foreign Companies	22 (95.70)	1 (4.30)	21 (87.50)	3 (12.50)	21 (91.30)	2 (8.70)	37 (100)	0 (0.00)	101 (94.40)	6 (5.60)	4.835	0.184	0.213	-0.119	Accepted
Association of Entrepreneurs	16 (69.60)	7 (30.40)	13 (54.20)	11 (45.80)	14 (60.90)	9 (39.10)	23 (62.20)	14 (37.80)	66 (61.70)	41 (38.30)	1.188	0.756	0.105	0.024	Accepted

Insurance Companies	22 (95.70)	1 (4.30)	20 (83.30)	4 (16.7)0	20 (87.00)	3 (13.00)	35 (94.60)	2 (5.40)	97 (90.70)	10 (9.30)	3.246	0.355	0.174	-0.033	Accepted
International Donors	23 (100)	0 (0.00)	23 (95.80)	1 (4.20)	21 (91.30)	2 (8.70)	37 (100)	0 (0.00)	104 (97.20)	3 (2.80)	4.824	0.185	0.212	-0.016	Accepted
Consulting Companies and Agencies	23 (100)	0 (0.00)	21 (87.50)	3 (12.50)	20 (87.00)	3 (13.00)	37 (100)	0 (0.00)	101 (94.40)	6 (5.60)	8.121	**0.044***	0.275	-0.055	**Rejected**
Banks	19 (82.60)	4 (17.40)	16 (66.70)	8 (33.30)	19 (82.60)	4 (17.40)	32 (86.50)	5 (13.50)	86 (80.40)	21 (19.60)	3.881	0.275	0.190	-0.096	Accepted
Chambers of Commerce	20 (87.00)	3 (13.00)	18 (75.00)	6 (25.00)	17 (73.90)	6 (26.10)	33 (89.20)	4 (10.80)	88 (82.20)	19 (17.80)	3.527	0.317	0.182	-0.055	Accepted

Source: Compiled by researcher

Table 2 states that no Enterprise out of 23 in the Age group of fifteen years was aware of Consulting Companies and Agencies' assistance to the MSME Sector. Three out of 24 Enterprises falling under the age band of 16 to 30 years were found to be aware of Consulting Companies and Agencies' assistance to MSME Sector while three out of 23 Enterprises falling under the Age band of 31 to 45 years were found to be aware of Consulting Companies and Agencies' assistance to MSME Sector. No Enterprise (37)from the Age group of 46 years and above was found to be aware of Consulting Companies and Agencies' assistance to the MSME Sector,$\chi^2(3, N=107) = 8.121$, $*p < 0.05$; $\Phi_c = .275$;$r_s = -.055$).

Interpretation

The results of the Chi-Square reveal that the P values of all enterprises are greater than the significance level of 0.05, except for the P value recorded against Consulting Companies and Agencies. The P value as recorded against Consulting Companies and Agencies is 0.044, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the Null hypothesis for Consulting Companies and Agencies is rejected, which implies that there is a significant association between an Enterprise's age and its awareness level regarding assistance provided by Consulting Companies and Agencies

to the MSME sector. In other words, it also implies that the Age of the Enterprises has a significant impact on the perception of Enterprises related to Consulting Companies and Agencies.

Conclusion

But for Consulting Companies and Agencies, the null hypothesis for all other supporting organizations providing support to the MSME sector is accepted, implying that there is no significant relation/association between Enterprises' age and their awareness level regarding all other organisations that provide assistance to the MSME sector. In other words, it also implies that organisations lack basic knowledge about the support being offered to them by different organisations. The economic significance of MSMEs is clearly depicted by their contribution to GDP, Employment generation, export share, etc. Therefore, MSMEs boost the engine of economic growth in both developed as well as developing economies. Hence, it becomes very important for the Government initiatives to bolster the MSME sector by providing them with institutional support to MSMEs.

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Sustainable Agriculture Practices in Benue State, Nigeria

Nathan Udoinyang†

Abstract

This study looks at the financial advantages of sustainable farming techniques in Benue State, Nigeria, with an emphasis on analyzing how these methods affect farmers' income, food security, and livelihoods. The study uses a mixed-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, including a survey of 300 farmers who were randomly selected from fifteen local government areas out of the twenty-three LGSs that made up the state (5 from each of the 3 senatorial districts) and focus group discussions with 30 farmers. Including increased income, enhanced food security, and better lives, the investigation shows that sustainable agricultural methods greatly help Benue State's farmers economically. The study also notes several variables affecting the acceptance of sustainable agriculture solutions: socioeconomic conditions, biophysical factors, resource access, government policy, risk aversion, infrastructure, and market incentives. The results of the study have major policy and practice implications, therefore implying that legislators should encourage the use of sustainable agriculture techniques by means of incentives and infrastructure investment, and that farmers, extension agents, and other interested groups should be taught and trained on the benefits and methods of sustainable agriculture. The research adds to the increasing body of knowledge on sustainable agriculture techniques in Nigeria and emphasizes the need for more studies on the long-term economic advantages of these practices.

Keywords: Agriculture, Benue State, Sustainability, Nigeria.

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Introduction

Nigeria's economy depends on agriculture, which offers millions of people jobs and income and greatly boosts the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the agricultural industry in Nigeria is under a lot of pressure, including climate change, water scarcity, and soil degradation (Ogbonna et al., 2018). These difficulties have great effects on the ability of agriculture in Nigeria to last as well as on the quality of living of farmers and rural people. Key strategy regarding the difficulties confronting the agricultural industry in Nigeria has been found to be sustainable agriculture methods (SAPs, Mazi, 2017). SAPs call for the employment of farming techniques that give economic viability, social equity, and environmental sustainability a top priority, according to the FAO (2017). Among other things, these methods include organic fertilizing, crop rotation, and sustainable farming. Pretty et al. (2011) show that the implementation of SAPs offers many financial advantages for rural communities and farmers. Among these advantages are higher crop yields, better soil fertility, and better livelihoods (Huang et al., 2015). SAPs have also been shown to help in the mitigation and adjustment of climate change as well as in the preservation of biodiversity (IPCC 2019). Although SAPs have many advantages, few studies have been conducted on their economic merits in Nigeria, especially in Benue State. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Benue State is a leading agriculture producer in Nigeria and contributes significantly to the country's agricultural output. But the agricultural industry of the state is up against many obstacles, including soil erosion, limited water, and global warming. This research intends to evaluate the financial advantages of sustainable farming techniques in Benue State, Nigeria. In particular, the research plans to:

i. Assess the financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques in Benue State.

ii. Consider the issues affecting the acceptance of sustainable farming techniques in Benue State.

This research is important as it will add to the fast-growing body of literature on sustainable agribusiness approaches in Nigeria. The results of the survey will offer useful information on the factors affecting the usage of SAPs in Benue State as well as their economic advantages. Particularly in the fields of agricultural development and environmental conservation, the results of the research will also guide policy and action.

Theoretical Literature

The Sustainable Agriculture Theory

Pretty (1995) first introduced the Sustainable Agriculture Theory; Altieri (2002) then developed it further. According to this idea, sustainable agriculture is a whole approach to agriculture geared toward environmental sustainability, social fairness, and economic feasibility (Pretty, 1995). The theory states that sustainable agriculture maintains soil fertility, lowers pollution, and fosters biodiversity by means of methods including organic fertilizers, crop rotation, and conservation (Altieri, 2002). Among other experts who have mentioned this theory in their works are Huang et al. (2015), who used it to assess the economic and environmental effects of sustainable agriculture in China. This study benefits from this theory since it gives a structure for comprehending the ideas and methods of sustainable agriculture, which forms an important component of this work.

Economic Efficiency Theory

First presented by Pareto (1906), the Economic Efficiency Theory was developed further by Debreu (1959). According to the theory, economic efficiency results from how resources are distributed to maximize economic output (Pareto, 1906). The theory holds that economic efficiency is judged by the ratio of output to input, and it is attained when the marginal rate of transformation between outputs equals the marginal rate of substitution between inputs (Debreu, 1959). Mazi (2017), for instance, applied the Economic Efficiency Theory to assess the economic efficiency of sustainable agriculture techniques in Nigeria; other academics have referenced this theory in their works. Since it gives a structure for grasping the financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques, which is a main aspect of this research, this theory applies here.

Environmental Impact Assessment Theory

Propounded by Caldwell (1969) and further developed by Canter (1996), the Environmental Impact Assessment Theory is According to the theory presented (Caldwell, 1969), environmental impact assessment is a mechanism of identifying and judging the possible environmental effects of a regulation or initiative. Canter (1996) says the theory holds that environmental impact evaluation uses instruments such as environmental impact statements and cost-benefit analysis to appraise the possible environmental effects of a law or project. For instance, other researchers have referenced this theory in their work; Huang et al. (2015) used the Environmental Impact Assessment Theory to assess the environmental effects of sustainable farming in China. Since it

offers a structure for grasping the environmental effects of sustainable agriculture methods—something fundamental to this research—this theory is pertinent here.

Empirical Literature Review

Adebayo et al. (2020) carried out research entitled "Assessing the economic benefits of sustainable agriculture practices in Nigeria". The research gathered information from three hundred Oyo State, Nigeria farmers using a survey approach. According to the study's results, sustainable agriculture techniques raised farmers' revenue by 25%, lessened poverty by 30%, and enhanced food security by 20%. The research also discovered that the adoption of sustainable agriculture techniques was determined by variables including knowledge, extension services, and credit availability. The research found that sustainable agriculture methods were economically advantageous to Nigerian farmers, so it advised legislators to encourage their use. More studies should be undertaken to assess the environmental effects of sustainable agriculture techniques in Nigeria, the research concluded.

Ogbonna et al. (2020) conducted a study titled "Economic Analysis of organic farming in Nigeria". Using a cost-benefit analysis approach, the research gathered data from 100 organic farmers in Imo State, Nigeria. The findings of the study showed organic agriculture to be more profitable than traditional agriculture, with a net gain of ₦150,000 per hectare. The study also discovered that access to the market, extension services, and education all affected the adoption of organic farming methods. Organic farming was found to be economically feasible in Nigeria by the research, so the use of organic farming techniques was advised to be supported by government leaders. Further studies should be done to assess the environmental effects of organic agriculture in Nigeria, the research concluded.

Mazi et al. (2021) researched "sustainable agriculture methods and food security in Nigeria." Using a survey design, the research gathered information from five hundred Benue State, Nigerian farmers. According to the study's results, sustainable farming methods raised crop yields by 25%, cut poverty by 20%, and bolstered food security by 30%. The research also discovered that the use of sustainable agriculture methods was shaped by such variables as access to credit, extension services, and educational level. The research found that sustainable agriculture techniques helped to increase food security in Nigeria. Assert therefore suggested that legislators advance the application of such methods. Further studies are advised by the report to assess the environmental effects of sustainable agricultural methods in Nigeria.

Nwankwo et al. 2021 carried out research named "Economic analysis of conservation agriculture in Nigeria". By means of a cost-benefit analysis strategy, the research gathered data from 150 Anambra State, Nigeria, conservation agriculture farmers. With a net advantage of ₦200,000 per hectare, the study's results showed that conservation agriculture was more lucrative than traditional agriculture. The research also discovered that education, extension services, and market access affected the acceptance of conservation agriculture techniques. The research found that in Nigeria, conservation agriculture was economically feasible and advised legislators to help promote the use of such practices. More study was advised by the analysis to assess the environmental consequences of conservation farming in Nigeria.

Ogunniyi et al. (2022) conducted a study titled "Assessing the impact of sustainable agriculture practices on rural livelihoods in Nigeria" to evaluate the impact of sustainable agriculture practices on rural livelihoods in Nigeria. With a survey approach, the research found that sustainable agriculture methods reduced poverty by 20%, raised income by 30%, and increased rural livelihoods by 25%. Data were gathered from 300 farmers in Ogun State, Nigeria. Additionally, the research discovered that access to credit, extension services, and the level of education all affected the acceptance of sustainable agriculture techniques. Sustainable agriculture methods were found by the study to be working in raising rural life in Nigeria, so it suggested that policymakers should encourage their implementation. Further study should be done to assess the environmental effects of sustainable agriculture techniques in Nigeria, the report advised.

Adeyemi et al. (2023) carried out research titled "Economic benefits of agroforestry practices in Nigeria". Using a cost-benefit analysis method and gathering data from 100 agroforestry farmers in Osun State, Nigeria, the research discovered that agroforestry techniques were more lucrative than traditional agriculture, with a net benefit of ₦250,000 per hectare. Education, extension services, and market access also determined who accepted agroforestry techniques, according to the research. Agroforestry methods were found to be economically sustainable in Nigeria by the research.

The empirical research reviewed above offers useful information on the financial advantages of sustainable agricultural practices in Nigeria. Still, the body of work has some clearly defined voids. While the reviewed studies emphasized the financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques, most of the studies reviewed concentrated on such practices in all of Nigeria without taking into account the particular difficulties and possibilities faced by certain areas, such as

Benue State, as the reviewed ones did not satisfactorily weigh the environmental effects of these techniques, including soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss. The studies reviewed did not properly investigate the policy and institutional causes of sustainable agricultural practices in Nigeria, such as government policies, extension services, and market access, which affect their adoption and efficiency. Some of the studies reviewed used insufficiently rigorous methodological approaches to offer definitive proof of the economic advantages of sustainable agriculture practices in Nigeria. Most of the reviewed studies were mostly cross-sectional, without considering the long-term consequences of sustainable agriculture methods on the surroundings, economy, and society, and they mostly focused on medium- and large-scale farmers, ignoring the particular difficulties and opportunities encountered by smallholder farmers, who constitute most of the farmers in Nigeria. These gaps call for more study on the economic advantages of sustainable farming methods in Nigeria, especially in Benue State, so that more sophisticated and geographically relevant insights can be given.

Methodology

The approach in research combines two different quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methodologies. The research took place in Benue State, Nigeria, and 300 smallholder farmers from fifteen local government areas out of the twenty-three LGSs that constituted the state were randomly chosen (5 from each of the 3 senatorial districts). The farmers were given a structured questionnaire to gather information on their socioeconomic profile, farming techniques, and attitudes toward sustainable agriculture practices. Before it was given, the survey was pre-tested and confirmed. Furthermore, 30 farmers participated in focus group meetings to get more thorough information on their difficulties and experiences with sustainable agriculture approaches. Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and econometric models were used to analyze the quantitative data; thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The analysis of the cost-benefit approach was also used to assess the financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques; a multinomial logistic regression model was used to find the variables affecting the acceptance of sustainable agriculture practices. SPSS version 25 and STATA version 14 were used to analyze the data.

Benefits of sustainable agriculture practices in Benue State

1. Sustainable agriculture raises farmers' income by means of premium prices for sustainably grown produce, therefore alleviating poverty and enhancing livelihoods.

2. Sustainable agriculture offers job possibilities in rural areas, therefore helping local economic growth and lowering unemployment.

3. Sustainable farming provides farmers better access to national and local markets, therefore allowing them to competitively price their goods.

4. Sustainable agriculture lowers farmers' expenses by minimizing the use of outside inputs, including synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and encouraging the use of local goods.

5. Economic Viability for Farmers: Over the long term, sustainable agriculture fosters many revenue streams, improves soil health, and lowers input expenses, as a result, enhancing the financial feasibility of farms.

6. Sustainable farming gives first place to the creation of high-quality, nutritious food rich for both the body and the soul, thus boosting general health and consumer demand for sustainably made products.

7. Sustainable agriculture enhances food security by means of which it increases the abundance of nutritious food, lowers hunger and malnutrition, and raises public health.

8. Resilient Communities: Promoting regional food systems, improving food security, and developing lively, resilient communities, sustainable farming techniques help to fortify the resiliency of people.

Factors influencing the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices in Benue State

1. Age, level of education, and income of farmers play a key part in the acceptance of sustainable farming techniques. Higher-earning, well-educated farmers embrace sustainable methods.

2. Important biophysical elements affecting the acceptance of sustainable farming methods are the variety of crops, soil quality, and climate. Farmers with access to appropriate soil and weather are more prone to embrace sustainable techniques.

3. The adoption of sustainable agriculture methods depends on access to credit, expansion programs, and markets, as well as other resources. Access to these resources helps farmers to more probably embrace sustainable methods.

4. Government Policy: Programs and policies shape the acceptance of sustainable farming techniques. These policies include subsidies or tax cuts, which motivate farmers to accept these methods.

5. Farmers' risk aversion affects their choice of adopting sustainable agriculture methods. More risk-averse farmers less probably accept sustainable practices.

6. Access to good infrastructure--including roads, storage, and irrigation--affects the acceptance of sustainable farming techniques. Farmers with access to decent infrastructure are more likely to embrace sustainable practices.

7. Farmers who can access markets that offer premium prices for sustainable crops are more likely to adopt sustainable practices. Market incentives such as premium prices for sustainably produced crops influence the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices.

Discussion of findings

Benue State, Nigeria farmers benefit enormously financially from the results of this research on sustainable agriculture methods. According to the research, farmers who used sustainable farming procedures had more money, better food security, and superior standards of living than did not use such methods. Concurrent with the theory of sustainable agriculture, which holds that sustainable agriculture techniques can improve the economic viability of farms while also advancing environmental sustainability and social equity (Pretty, 1995), the results of the study are consistent with the empirical literature reviewed, which emphasizes the economic advantages of such practices (Adebayo et al., 2020; Ogbonna et al., 2020).

Several variables, including socioeconomic issues, biophysical conditions, access to resources, government policy, risk aversion, infrastructure, and market incentives, all had an impact on the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices according to the study. These results correspond with the empirical studies examined, which stress the significance of these variables in determining the acceptance of sustainable farming methods (Mazi et al., 2021 & Nwankwo et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In Benue State, Nigeria, this research has given a thorough examination of the financial advantages of environmentally friendly farming methods. According to the results of the research, sustainable agriculture methods provide Benue State farmers considerable economic advantages, including better livelihoods, enhanced food security, and raised income. Several variables that affect the acceptance of sustainable farming techniques include socioeconomic elements, biophysical elements, and access to resources, government policy, risk aversion, infrastructure, and market incentives, according to the results of the research. Significant consequences for policy and practice result from the analysis of the data. By offering incentives like subsidies, tax cuts, and extension services, the research indicates that legislators should encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural methods. The study also recommends that legislators should support the implementation of sustainable agriculture approaches by funding roadways, storage facilities, and irrigation systems. Moreover, the results of the study indicate that farmers, extension agents, and other interested parties need to be taught and trained on the practices and advantages of sustainable agriculture. This will assist in raising awareness and acceptance of environmentally friendly farming methods among Benue State farmers. Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that more research is required on the financial advantages of sustainable agricultural practices in Benue State. The long-term financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques, as well as the possible difficulties and constraints of their adoption should be further researched in future publications. This study, in essence, offers important insights into the financial advantages of Benue State, Nigeria's sustainable agriculture methods. The results of the research have important policy and practice implications and indicate that sustainable agriculture techniques could raise farmers' quality of life and support environmental sustainability in Benue State.

Recommendations

For stakeholders, legislators, and Benue State government officials, the study proposes the following:

i. To aid in the encouragement of sustainable agriculture methods, incentives such as tax advantages, grants, and extension programs should be given by stakeholders, legislators, and the government.

ii. To facilitate the implementation of sustainable agriculture techniques, stakeholders, legislators, and the government should allocate funds to infrastructure, including highways, storage buildings, and irrigation systems.

iii. Farmers, extension agents, and other players should be educated and trained on the advantages and methods of sustainable agriculture.

iv. More studies should be carried out on the financial advantages of sustainable food methods in Benue State.

Limitations of the Study

The study has these constraints:

1. Benue State, Nigeria, was the only focus of the investigation, so the results could not be extrapolated to other nations or regions.

2. Because secondary data sources—that might not be current or precise—were used, the research depended on them.

3. The research looked not at the long-term financial advantages of sustainable farming methods.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future investigators should consider the following based on the review:

1. Study the long-term economic advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques in Benue State.

2. Analyze the possible problems and constraints of using sustainable farming techniques in Benue State.

3. Compare the financial advantages of sustainable agriculture techniques across various states or nations.

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কাজী নজরুলের প্রবন্ধে দেশ ও সমাজভাবনা

মানস জানা[†]

সংক্ষিপ্তসার:

বিশ শতকের দুইয়ের দশকের শেষ দিকে বাংলা সাহিত্য জগতে কাজী নজরুল ইসলামের আবির্ভাব। এই নতুন যুগের আলোড়ন , আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষার দ্বন্দ্ব, শোষণ- নিপীড়নের বেদনাকে সাহিত্যে রূপ দিতেই যেন এগিয়ে এলেন তিনি। বিষয়, ভাব ও যুক্তির প্রাবল্যে তাঁর প্রবন্ধগুলি যথেষ্ট আলোচনার দাবি রাখে। শুধু তাই নয়, এই প্রবন্ধগুলি একটি সময়ের দলিল। তাঁর প্রবন্ধ ও অভিভাষণ প্রায় একশো'র কাছাকাছি। সংখ্যাটা খুব নগণ্য নয়। এর অনেকগুলি সান্ধ্য দৈনিক 'নবযুগ', অর্ধ সাপ্তাহিক 'ধূমকেতু', সাপ্তাহিক 'লাঙ্গল' পত্রিকায় সম্পাদকীয় আকারে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল। প্রবন্ধের মধ্যে যুক্তি-শৃঙ্খলা, বিচারবোধ, মননশীলতা, নজরুলের প্রবন্ধ সাহিত্যের অন্যতম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সাফল্য। তাঁর রচনাশৈলীর আর একটি দিক হল, প্রবন্ধের বিন্যাস, পরিচ্ছেদ বিভাজন এবং ভাবের প্রবাহে কোথাও বাধা সৃষ্টি করেননি। এই প্রবন্ধাবলী বাংলা সাহিত্যে ভিন্ন মাত্রা সংযোজন করেছে।

সূচক শব্দ: হিন্দু - মুসলমান সম্পর্ক, সাম্যবাদ, বাংলার বিপ্লববাদী আন্দোলন, জন সাহিত্য, ভারতীয় রেনেসাঁস

I

ভূমিকা

বিংশ শতাব্দীর সূচনা থেকে ব্রিটিশ শাসিত ভারতে তিনটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পরিবর্তন দেশের মধ্যবিত্ত এবং শ্রমিক, কৃষক বিশেষত শিক্ষিত জনসাধারণকে গভীরভাবে আলোড়িত করেছিল। বাংলায় ব্রিটিশ বিরোধী বিপ্লববাদী আন্দোলন, প্রথম বিশ্বযুদ্ধ এবং রাশিয়ায় প্রথম সমাজতান্ত্রিক বিপ্লব এদেশেও শিল্প-সাহিত্য সৃষ্টিতে নতুন প্রাণের সঞ্চার করে। বিশ শতকের দুইয়ের দশকের শেষ দিকে বাংলা সাহিত্য জগতে কাজী নজরুল

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ইসলামের আবির্ভাব। এই নতুন যুগের আলোড়ন , আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষার দ্বন্দ্ব, শোষণ- নিপীড়নের বেদনাকে সাহিত্যে রূপ দিতেই যেন এগিয়ে এলেন তিনি। ভারতীয় নবজাগরণের যৌবনোদ্দীপ্ত ধারার চিন্তা তাঁর সৃষ্টিকে করেছে মহান। কাজী নজরুলের সৃষ্টি নিয়ে বিভ্রান্তি বিস্তর। তাঁর সৃষ্টি-সম্ভার যদিও কম নয়, তাহলেও গান ও কবিতা নিয়ে যত আলোচনা হয়, প্রবন্ধ, নাটক- নাটিকা, গল্প ও উপন্যাস ধরে আলোচনা হয় তুলনায় কম। তাঁর প্রবন্ধ এবং অভিভাষণগুলিকে একসঙ্গে রেখেই সমালোচকরা আলোচনা করেন। কারণ, নজরুলের সাহিত্যের একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পর্ব তাঁর সম্পাদিত পত্র-পত্রিকা এবং সাংবাদিকতার কাজের ভেতর থেকে উঠে এসেছে। বিষয়, ভাব ও যুক্তির প্রাবল্যে প্রবন্ধগুলি যথেষ্ট আলোচনার দাবি রাখে। শুধু তাই নয়, এই প্রবন্ধগুলি একটি সময়ের দলিল হিসেবে ইতিহাসে স্থান করে নেবে। আলোচনার সুবিধার্থে, বর্তমান সময়ে অত্যন্ত প্রাসঙ্গিক তাঁর দেশভাবনার গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দিকগুলিকেই এই প্রবন্ধে তুলে ধরা হয়েছে।

II

নজরুলের মতাদর্শ

কাজী নজরুলের প্রবন্ধ, আলোচনা ও অভিভাষণ প্রায় একশো'র কাছাকাছি। সংখ্যাটা খুব নগণ্য নয়। এর অনেকগুলি সান্ধ্য দৈনিক 'নবযুগ', অর্ধ সাপ্তাহিক 'ধূমকেতু', সাপ্তাহিক 'লাঙ্গল' পত্রিকায় সম্পাদকীয় আকারে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল। পরবর্তী সময়ে তা 'যুগবাণী', 'রুদ্রমঙ্গল', ও 'দুর্দিনের যাত্রী' গ্রন্থগুলিতে স্থান করে নেয়। 'যুগবাণী' যদিও ব্রিটিশ সরকার দ্বারা বাজেয়াপ্ত হয়েছিল। 'নবযুগ' নিয়ে এসেছিল ব্রিটিশ বিরোধী আন্দোলনের গমক। আর 'লাঙ্গল' রাশিয়ার সমাজতান্ত্রিক বিপ্লবের আবহে সাম্যবাদী চিন্তার দ্বারা রঞ্জিত।

নজরুলের প্রবন্ধগুলির ভেতর প্রবেশ করতে গেলে জানতে হবে তাঁর রাজনৈতিক মতাদর্শ। ভারতে তৎকালীন ব্রিটিশ শাসকের রুশ বিপ্লব ভীতি থেকে বামপন্থী রাজনীতির সম্পর্কে আতঙ্ক ছিল তীব্র। স্বদেশী আন্দোলন বা অসহযোগ আন্দোলনের চেয়ে বাংলার বিপ্লবী কর্মকাণ্ড তথা জাতীয় বিপ্লববাদের প্রতি শাসক শ্রেণির নজর ছিল অপেক্ষাকৃত কড়া। শুরুর দিকে যৌবনের আবেগ এবং ব্রিটিশ শাসন - শোষণের প্রতি ঘৃণা থেকে জাতীয় কংগ্রেসের একজন স্বেচ্ছাসেবক হিসেবে নজরুল নিজেকে যুক্ত করেন। কিন্তু এখানে থেমে থাকতে তিনি পারেন না। যে আগুন তাঁর হৃদয়ে প্রজ্জ্বলিত ছিল, অত্যাচার - মিথ্যার সঙ্গে তা কখনও আপস করতে পারে না। ব্রিটিশ শাসন বিরোধী আন্দোলনে তিনি নিজেকে যুক্ত করেছিলেন শুধু আবেগ ও সংগ্রামী চেতনা থেকেই,

তা কিন্তু নয়। তিনি মনেপ্রাণে চেয়েছিলেন সাম্রাজ্যবাদ ও সামন্ততান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থার অবসান। জমিদার, নায়েব, গোমস্তাদের অত্যাচারে তখন প্রজার প্রাণ হয়ে উঠত ওষ্ঠাগত। স্বাধীনতার আকূতি নিয়েই বিদেশি দ্রব্য বর্জন থেকে কারাবরণ, অনশন ইত্যাদি কোনো কিছুকেই নজরুল ছোটো করে দেখেননি। অহিংস অসহযোগ আন্দোলনের ভুল -ভ্রান্তি, ব্যর্থতা, দুর্বলতা প্রত্যক্ষ করে সেই নজরুল কংগ্রেসী জাতীয়তাবাদী আন্দোলন, এমনকি গান্ধীবাদের উপরেও আস্থা হারালেন। অহিংস আন্দোলনকে ব্যঙ্গ করেছিলেন। ১৯২১ সালে জাতীয় কংগ্রেসের আমেদাবাদ অধিবেশনে উত্থাপিত প্রস্তাবের বিরোধিতা করে ধূমকেতুর সম্পাদকীয়তে স্পষ্টভাবে লিখেছিলেন, সর্বপ্রথম, ধুমকেতু ভারতের পূর্ণ স্বাধীনতা চায়।

নজরুল সাম্যবাদী মতাদর্শের অনেক কাছাকাছি নিজেকে প্রতিষ্ঠিত করলেও, সাম্যবাদের আস্থা-বিশ্বাস তৈরি হলেও, তাঁর বন্ধু মুজফ্ফর আহমেদ প্রতিষ্ঠিত ভারতীয় কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির সদস্যপদ তিনি নেননি। কিন্তু তিনি যে শ্রমিক - কৃষকদের মুক্তির সংগ্রামে নিজেকে যুক্ত রাখতে চান, তা প্রকাশ পায় শ্রমিক-প্রজা-স্বরাজ দলের অন্যতম সংগঠক হিসেবে নিজেকে তুলে ধরার মধ্য দিয়ে। নজরুল প্রথাসিদ্ধ আনুষ্ঠানিক ধর্মকে নিজ ধর্ম হিসেবে গ্রহণ করেননি। ধর্মের নিহিত সত্য, ধর্মের কল্যাণকর রূপই ছিল তাঁর ধর্ম। সেজন্য অনায়াসে নামাজ, রোজা, উপাসনার রীতি-নীতি জীবন থেকে ছেঁটে ফেলতে ভয় পাননি। কামাল পাশার প্রসঙ্গ টেনে বলেছিলেন, দাড়ি রোজা রেখে, গোস্ত খেয়ে যে দেশ উদ্ধার হবে না, তা সত্য। মুসলমান সমাজের রক্ষণশীল অংশের মধ্যে নজরুলের এই সমস্ত বক্তব্য তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়া সৃষ্টি করেছিল। মনুষ্যত্ব, মানবতা, মানব কল্যাণ-- এসবই আসলে ছিল নজরুলের ধর্মবোধের মৌল ভিত্তি।

III

কাজী নজরুল ও মুসলমান সমাজ

কাজী নজরুল ইসলামের নিজের কথায় তাঁর সাহিত্য চিন্তা বিষয়ক ভাবনা তুলে না ধরলে, সামগ্রিকভাবে নজরুলের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর স্বাতন্ত্র্য বোঝা যাবে না। তিনি বলেছিলেন, "আমি এই দেশে, এই সমাজে জন্মেছি বলেই শুধু এই দেশেরই এই সমাজেরই নই। আমি সকল দেশের, সকল মানুষের। সুন্দরের ধ্যান, তাঁর স্তবগানই আমার উপাসনা, আমার ধর্ম। যে কুলে, যে সমাজে, যে ধর্মে, যে দেশেই জন্মগ্রহণ করি, সে আমার দৈব। আমি

তাকে ছাড়িয়ে উঠতে পেরেছি বলেই কবি।" (ইসলাম, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি, ২০০১, দ্বিতীয় খন্ড, পৃ: ৪৭৭)

বাঙালি মুসলমান সমাজের কুসংস্কার, গোঁড়ামি, অন্ধতা দূর করার জন্য সচেষ্ট হয়েছিলেন নজরুল। বাংলার মুসলমান সমাজকে, বিশেষত তরুণদেরকে জ্ঞানে-কর্মে ও আত্মত্যাগে উদ্বুদ্ধ করতে চেয়েছেন। বাংলার তরুণ শিক্ষিত মুসলমান যুবকদের হৃদয়ে জ্ঞানের প্রদীপ প্রজ্জ্বলিত করতে চেয়েছিলেন। এমন উদ্বুদ্ধ যে কেউ করতে পারেন না। জীবনকে পরিপূর্ণভাবে উপলব্ধি করতে পারা বলতে কি বুঝায়, তা তরুণদের তিনি চোখে আঙুল দিয়ে দেখিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন। ইসলামের প্রকৃত শিক্ষা কী? দুর্বলতা, ভীরুতা, জড়তা, হীনমন্যতা কীভাবে কাটিয়ে উঠতে হবে, যথার্থ মর্যাদাময় জীবন বলতে কি বুঝায়, জীবনে আনন্দ ও সৌন্দর্যের অর্থ কি, এসব কথাগুলো সেদিন মুসলমান যুব সম্প্রদায়ের সামনে তাঁকে তুলে ধরতে হয়েছে। মুসলমান যুব সম্প্রদায় তাঁকে সেদিন সাদরে গ্রহণ করেছিল। ভারতীয় নবজাগরণ এবং স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামে অনেক বড় বড় চরিত্র সামনে থাকা সত্ত্বেও, কেন নজরুলই যুব সম্প্রদায়ের কাছে এতখানি গ্রহণযোগ্য হয়ে উঠেছিলেন -- তার উত্তরও এখানেই নিহিত আছে। সেই অধিকার তিনি অর্জন করেছিলেন। যুব সমাজকে আকর্ষণ করার ক্ষমতা তৎকালে নজরুলের মতো খুব কম দেশনেতার ছিল। হিন্দু- মুসলমান নির্বিশেষে সবার কাছে নজরুল ছিলেন অত্যন্ত জনপ্রিয়। একাধারে কবি, গায়ক এবং দেশসেবক। কখনও কখনও মুসলমান যুবকদের ভীরুতা, দুর্বলতা, পশ্চাৎপদতার জন্য তীব্র শ্লেষ - ব্যঙ্গ- বিদ্রুপ করেছেন। কারণ, নিজ সমাজের তরুণ সম্প্রদায়ের দিক্‌ভ্রান্ত অবস্থা, হতাশা নজরুলকে মর্মে মর্মে আঘাত করেছিল। তিনি এই সমাজকে ভালোবেসেছিলেন, শোষণ - নিপীড়ন প্রত্যক্ষ করেছিলেন। তাদের উদ্বুদ্ধ করতে কখনও বা হিন্দু যুবকদের প্রশংসা করেছেন। মূলত তা এই যুব সমাজকে আন্দোলিত করার জন্য। বলেছেন, যশ, খ্যাতি, লোভ, স্বার্থপরতা-- এসব দিয়ে হবে না। এই সমাজে উন্নত সংস্কৃতির বাতাবরণ তৈরি করতে চেয়েছিলেন। চাকুরীর মোহের মধ্যে তাদের আটকে রাখতে চাননি। তাদের মেরুদণ্ডহীন করে রাখতে চাননি। তাদের অস্থিমজ্জায় যথার্থ প্রাণ সঞ্চারিত করতে চেয়েছিলেন। কী গভীর আবেগ নিয়ে তাদের উদ্বুদ্ধ করেছেন, তা সত্যিই শিক্ষণীয়।

নজরুল যুব সমাজের উদ্দেশ্যে বলেছিলেন, কণ্ঠ - সংগীতে, রাগ-রাগিণীতে, যন্ত্রসংগীতে যারা যথার্থই গুণী, তারা তো প্রায় সকলেই মুসলমান। অথচ বাংলার মুসলমানদের মধ্যে বৈজ্ঞানিক, চিত্রশিল্পী নাই কেন? পশুর মতো কেবল সংখ্যায় বেড়ে গিয়ে কী হবে, যদি গৌরব করবার মতো কিছু না থাকে?

বাংলার শিক্ষিত মুসলমান তরুণদের বাংলা সাহিত্য সৃষ্টিতে উদ্বুদ্ধ করতে, সর্বোপরি বাংলা সাহিত্যের প্রতি আস্থাভাজন করে তুলতে চেষ্টা করেছিলেন নজরুল। এভাবেই বাঙালি মুসলমান শিক্ষিত যুবকদের স্বাধীনচিত্ততার জাগরণ ঘটাতে চেয়েছিলেন। বাঙালি মুসলমানদের বাংলা সাহিত্যের আপনজনে পরিণত করার দায়িত্ব নজরুলকেই নিতে হয়েছিল। নাহলে বাংলা সাহিত্যের মধ্যে বিভাজন হয়ে যেতে পারতো। সে সম্ভাবনা তো দেখা দিয়েছিলই। বাংলা সাহিত্যে কি হিন্দুদেরই প্রাধান্য থাকবে! এমন ধারণার বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই করে, রাশ টেনে ধরে, হতাশা দূর করলেন। বাংলা সাহিত্য যে হিন্দু - মুসলমান উভয়েরই সাহিত্য, তাকে প্রতিষ্ঠিত করতে বাংলা সাহিত্যের মূল স্রোতের অভিমুখী করে তুললেন শিক্ষিত মুসলমান সমাজকে। কেবল ইসলামী কাহিনি ও গৌরব গাথা তুলে ধরা নয়, হিন্দু পুরাণ, দেবদেবী প্রসঙ্গ নিয়ে এসে মুসলমান পাঠক সমাজকে ভাবালেন। যুক্তবেণী সাহিত্য ভাবনায় একটা বৃহৎ পরিসর উঠে এলো। বাংলা সাহিত্যের ইতিহাসে এই কর্মকাণ্ড কম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ নয়। এ দায়িত্ব নজরুল ছাড়া আর কেউ পালন করেননি। অন্য কারও পক্ষে তা করা সম্ভব ছিল না।

IV

নজরুলের প্রবন্ধে সাহিত্য -- সাহিত্যিক ও সমাজ

মানুষের জীবনকে সুন্দর ও উন্নততর করার প্রয়োজনেই শিল্পের সৃষ্টি। শিল্প তাই জীবনের রসরূপ প্রকাশ। সত্যের সঙ্গে যখন আনন্দের যোগ ঘটে, তখনই শিল্পের সৌন্দর্য্য সৃষ্টি হয়। শিল্পীর কাজ হল জীবনসত্যকে খুঁজে পাওয়া। এই জীবন কোনো না কোনো আর্থ-সামাজিক প্রেক্ষাপটের দ্বারা সীমায়িত। জাগতিক অন্য সব কিছুর মতোই মানবজীবনও সুনির্দিষ্ট কার্য-কারণ সম্পর্কের দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত। এই সম্পর্ককে জেনে-বুঝে সেই অনুযায়ী জীবনকে পরিচালিত করার মাধ্যমে রচিত হয় সভ্যতার ইতিহাস। আমাদের শিল্পকলার বেশির ভাগ বড়ো কীর্তি প্রকৃতির বিরুদ্ধে মানুষের সংগ্রামলব্ধ জ্ঞান বা চিন্তা থেকেই রসধৌত হয়ে এসেছে। সামাজিক মননশীলতার ঘাত-প্রতিঘাতের জটিল প্রক্রিয়ার একীকরণের (integration) পথেই সমাজমনন গড়ে উঠেছে। সমাজমননের ভেতর ও তার বাইরের দ্বন্দ্বের মধ্য দিয়েই বিকাশ লাভ করেছে মানুষের ভাবজগত। শিল্প সৃষ্টির চিন্তাও এই ভাবজগতেরই ফসল। যদি একথাই ধরা হয়, শিল্পী তাঁর অন্তর্লোকের তৃপ্তির জন্যই ব্যক্তিচিন্তার উপলব্ধির ভিত্তিতে শিল্প সৃষ্টির তাগিদ অনুভব করেন, তাহলেও এই মন সমাজবিচ্ছিন্ন নয়। প্রতিটি ব্যক্তিচিন্তা, ব্যক্তিভাবনা কোনো না কোনো সমাজচিন্তা, সমাজভাবনার ব্যক্তিকৃত রূপ। তাই সমাজ-বাস্তবকে অস্বীকার করে

অথবা এড়িয়ে গিয়ে অন্তর্লোকের তাগিদ এবং পরিতৃপ্তিতে মগ্ন থাকা সত্য সম্পর্কে উদাসীনতা বা অজ্ঞতার নামান্তর।

শিল্প-সাহিত্য সৃষ্টির এই মূলগত ভাবনাকে সামনে রেখেই নজরুলের সাহিত্য ও জীবনাচরণের মূল্যায়ন আবশ্যক। নজরুল সমাজ নিহিত সত্যকেই তুলে ধরতে চেয়েছিলেন। তাঁর কথায়-" সাহিত্যিকের, কবির, লেখকের প্রাণ হইবে আকাশের মত উন্মুক্ত উদার, তাহাতে কোনো ধর্মবিদ্বেষ, জাতিবিদ্বেষ, বড়ো-ছোটো জ্ঞান থাকিবে না। বাঁধ-দেওয়া ডোবার জলের মত যদি সাহিত্যিকের জীবন পঙ্কিল, সঙ্কীর্ণ, সীমাবদ্ধ হয়, তাহা হইলে তাঁহার সাহিত্য সাধনা সাংঘাতিকভাবে ব্যর্থ হইবে। তাঁহার সৃষ্ট সাহিত্য আঁতুড় ঘরেই মারা যাইবে। যাঁহার প্রাণ যত উন্মুক্ত, তিনি তত বড় সাহিত্যিক। কারণ সাহিত্য হইতেছে বিশ্বের, ইহা একজনের হইতে পারে না।...

তিনিই আটিস্ট, যিনি আর্ট ফুটাইয়া তুলিতে পারেন। আর্ট'-এর অর্থ' সত্যের প্রকাশ (execution of truth), এবং সত্য মাত্রেই সুন্দর, সত্য চিরমঙ্গলময়। আর্টকে সৃষ্টি, আনন্দ বা মানুষ এবং প্রকৃতি (man plus nature) ইত্যাদি অনেক কিছু বলা যাইতে পারে; তবে সত্যের প্রকাশই হইতেছে ইহার অন্যতম উদ্দেশ্য।" (ইসলাম, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি, ২০০১, প্রথম খন্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ৪২৭) সাহিত্য সম্পর্কে এই মৌলিক বক্তব্য তুলে ধরেছেন "বাঙলা সাহিত্যে মুসলমান" প্রবন্ধে। তিনি আনন্দ প্রকাশ করেছিলেন, বাংলার মুসলমান সমাজ বাংলা ভাষাকে মাতৃভাষা বলে স্বীকার করেছে। মুসলমান তরুণ লেখকদের লেখা দেখে তিনি আশা প্রকাশ করেন, এই লেখকরা বাংলা সাহিত্যে বহু উচ্চ আসন পাবেন। মুসলমান সমাজের কাছে ভিন্ন কোনো মত বা স্বজাতি সম্পর্কে আবেগের কথা নয়, তুলে ধরলেন বিশ্ব সাহিত্য সৃষ্টির কথা, সাহিত্যে সর্বজনীনতার কথা। বলেছেন, কীভাবে সাহিত্যিক নিজের ব্যথা দিয়া বিশ্বের কথা বলবেন।

সত্য উদঘাটনে নজরুল প্রত্যক্ষ করেছিলেন শাসক - শাসিতের দ্বন্দ্ব। এই দ্বন্দ্ব শুরু হয়েছিল সেদিন, যেদিন থেকে প্রাকৃতিক সম্পদ, সামাজিক সম্পদকে কিছু মানুষ গায়ের জোরে আপনার করতে চেয়েছে। যারা ক্ষমতাকে কুক্ষিগত করতে পেরেছে, সম্পদের উপর মালিকানা প্রতিষ্ঠিত করতে চেয়েছে-তারাই মালিক, প্রভু, শাসক। দাসতন্ত্র, সামন্ততন্ত্র, পুঁজিতন্ত্র পর্যন্ত সব সমাজই এই শ্রেণীদ্বন্দের আবর্তে-আবর্তিত হচ্ছে। অর্থনীতি, রাজনীতি, সমাজনীতি সহ ব্যক্তিমননের নানা দিক, যেমন স্নেহ-প্রেম-প্রীতি-দয়া সবই সমাজবাহিত এই নিয়মের দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত। তাই শ্রেণিবিভক্ত সমাজে প্রতিটি ব্যক্তির চিন্তা কোনো না কোনো শ্রেণির চিন্তা হতে বাধ্য।

শাসক ও শাসিত দু'ধরনের শ্রেণির চিন্তাই সমাজে সর্বদা ক্রিয়াশীল। একটি চিন্তা হল-- সাধারণভাবে যে সামাজিক, অর্থনৈতিক, রাজনৈতিক কাঠামোর মধ্যে মানুষ বাস করে, তাকে টিকিয়ে রাখা বা স্থিতাবস্থা বজায় রাখার পক্ষে। আর অন্যটি হল, তাকে পরিবর্তনের আকাঙ্ক্ষা থেকে সৃষ্ট চিন্তা। সাহিত্যিক শ্রেণিগত অবস্থানের প্রশ্নে শোষিত শ্রেণির প্রতিনিধি। তাই শোষিত মানুষের মর্মযন্ত্রণায় তিনি নিজেকে সামিল করতে চান। বঞ্চিত-নিপীড়িত মানুষের বাঁচার দাবিই সেকারণে তাঁর সাহিত্যে স্থান করে নেয়। যদিও অনেক সময়ই যে কোনো কারণেই হোক, সাহিত্যিক বাকচাতুরীর আড়ালে এমনভাবে আত্মগোপন করেন-- যার মধ্য থেকে সত্যকে খুঁজে পাওয়া দুষ্কর। সত্যের এই অপলাপ যথার্থ সাহিত্যসৃষ্টি করতে পারে না। সত্যকে বিকৃত করা বা অস্বীকার করার জন্য যে কত ধরনের পন্থা সৃষ্টি করা হয়, সে সম্পর্কে বলতে গিয়ে শরৎচন্দ্র ' সত্য ও মিথ্যা' প্রবন্ধে বলেছিলেন, "দেখতে পাই, বড়লাট হইতে শুরু করিয়া কনস্টেবল পর্যন্ত সবাই বলিতেছেন-- সত্যকে তাহারা বাধা দেন না, ন্যায়সঙ্গত সমালোচনা এমনকি তীব্র ও কটু হইলেও নিষেধ করেন না। তবে বক্তৃতা বা লেখা এমন হওয়া চাই, যাহাতে গভর্নমেন্টের বিরুদ্ধে ক্ষোভ না জন্মায়, ক্রোধের উদয় না হয়, চিত্তের কোনোপ্রকার চাঞ্চল্য না দেখা দেয় এমনি।.... কিন্তু এ অসম্ভব কি করিয়া সম্ভব করি?" (চট্টোপাধ্যায়, শরৎ রচনাবলী, ৩য় খন্ড, নাথ পাবলিশিং, পৌষ ১৪০১) ১৯২৩ খ্রিস্টাব্দের ৭ই জানুয়ারি 'রাজবন্দীর জবানবন্দীতে নজরুলও বলেছিলেন, "আজ ভারত পরাধীন। তার অধিবাসীবৃন্দ দাস। এটা নির্জলা সত্য। কিন্তু দাসকে দাস বললে, অন্যায়কে অন্যায় বললে এ রাজত্বে তা হবে রাজদ্রোহ। .... এই যে জোর করে সত্যকে মিথ্যা, অন্যায়কে ন্যায়, দিনকে রাত বলানো, একি সত্য সহ্য করতে পারে?" (ইসলাম, ২০০৫, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি, প্রথম খন্ড, পৃ: ৪৬২) নজরুলের কবিতায়, গানে রাজদ্রোহের সুর ধ্বনিত হয়েছে। শোষিত জনগণের হাতে এ সুর সমাজ পরিবর্তনের হাতিয়ারে পর্যবসিত হয়েছে। অনেকে এই সাহিত্যকে প্রচারধর্মী বলে, চড়া সুরের বলে আখ্যায়িত করেন। কিন্তু যা সমাজ বিচ্ছিন্ন বিষয় নয়, সমাজ অভ্যন্তরে নিহিত সত্যকে তুলে ধরে, তাকে শুধুই প্রচারধর্মী আখ্যা দেওয়া সঙ্গত নয়। নজরুল সাহিত্য সমাজের সঙ্গে অন্বিত অর্থনীতি, রাজনীতিকে তুলে ধরে আর এই রাজনৈতিক ধ্যানধারণা, মেহনতি মানুষের ঘামে-অশ্রুতে সিক্ত।

নজরুল তাঁর বিখ্যাত 'ছুঁৎমার্গ' প্রবন্ধে লিখেছেন, "মিথ্যার উপর ভিত্তি করিয়া কখনও কোন কার্যে পূর্ণ সাফল্য লাভ হয় না।...

হিন্দু হিন্দু থাক, মুসলমান মুসলমান থাক, শুধু একবার এই মহাগগণতলের সীমা-হারা মুক্তির মাঠে দাঁড়াইয়া-- মানব! -- তোমার কণ্ঠে সেই সৃষ্টির আদিম বাণী ফুটাও দেখি! বল দেখি, 'আমার মানুষ ধর্ম।' দেখিবে, দশদিকে সার্বভৌমিক সাড়ার আকুল স্পন্দন কাঁপিয়া উঠিতেছে।... মানবতার এই মহা-যুগে একবার গণ্ডী কাটিয়া বাহির হইয়া আসিয়া বল যে, তুমি ব্রাহ্মণ নও, শূদ্র নও, হিন্দু নও, মুসলমান নও, তুমি মানুষ-- তুমি সত্য।" (ইসলাম, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি, ২০০১, প্রথম খন্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ৪৩০)

নজরুল গভীরভাবে উপলব্ধি করতেন, হিন্দু- মুসলমান মিলনের প্রধান অন্তরায় হল এই ছোঁয়াছুঁয়ির জঘন্য ব্যাপারটা। নজরুল বারবার আশ্বস্ত করেছেন, প্রত্যেকেই তার তার নিজের ধর্মের সত্যকে জানুক। নিজের ধর্মের প্রতি বিশ্বাস থাকলে, অন্য সকলকে বিশ্বাস কররার শক্তি পাবে। আর অন্য মানুষকে ঘৃণা করে তারাই, যাদের নিজের কোনো ধর্ম নাই। এই উদারতায় নবীনদেরকেই আহ্বান করেছেন তিনি। জাতীয়তাবাদী আন্দোলনে সেই দুর্বলতা, বিদ্বেষ, বিভেদের সাংঘাতিক রূপ তিনি দেখেছিলেন। রাগে - ক্ষোভে বলেছিলেন, "কি ভীষণ প্রতারণা! মিথ্যার কী বিশ্রী মোহজাল! এই দিয়া তুমি একটা অখণ্ড জাতি গড়িয়া তুলিবে?" (ইসলাম, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি, ২০০১, প্রথম খন্ড, পৃষ্ঠা ৪৩০) নিজেকে সংযত করতে পারেননি। বলেই দিলেন, শুনিয়া হাসি পায়। একটি অখণ্ড জাতিসত্তা গড়ে তোলার সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক কাজটিই যে অপূরিত থেকে গিয়েছে নজরুল তা স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছিলেন। বিভেদের বীজ ছিল দেশ-নেতাদের আচরণে, অভ্যাসে। সেই বিভেদকে কাজে লাগিয়ে দেশে দাঙ্গা, হানাহানি চলেছে। সাম্প্রদায়িকতার রঙে রঞ্জিত হয়ে দেশের রাজনীতি মানুষের রক্তের হোলি খেলায় নামাতেও দ্বিধা বোধ করেনি। ইতিহাসের সেই ভ্রান্তি আজও কাটানোর চেষ্টা এদেশে হয়নি। নজরুল কিন্তু এই পরিস্থিতিতেও আশা ছাড়েননি। সেই মহা আহ্বান জানিয়ে গিয়েছেন বারেবারে।

তাঁর রচিত 'সত্য শিক্ষা', 'জাতীয় শিক্ষা' ও 'জাতীয় বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়' রচনাগুলিতে কিশোরদের, তরুণদের কাছে আহ্বান রেখেছিলেন দেশকে ভালোবাসা, দেশের প্রতি আবেগ কীভাবে গড়ে তোলার প্রয়োজন। সেজন্য বীরের আত্মত্যাগ, নির্ভীকতা অর্জন করতে হবে। জাতীয় বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় প্রতিষ্ঠার প্রয়োজনীয়তা তিনি মেনে নিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু কোথাও যেন ভন্ডামি, অমঙ্গল প্রবেশ না করে। লিখেছেন, আমাদের স্বার্থের মায়া ত্যাগ করে সত্যকেই বড়ো করে দেখতে শিখতে হবে। আমাদের আগে মানুষ হওয়ার সাধনায় নিজেদের যুক্ত হতে হবে। তবেই কি

না আমরা কোনো বড়ো কাজে হাত দিতে পারবো। দেহ- মন উভয়কেই গড়ে তোলার উপযোগী শিক্ষা দেওয়ার পক্ষপাতী ছিলেন নজরুল।

V

নজরুল: মিলিত সাধনার মূর্ত প্রতীক

নজরুলের আগে হিন্দু এবং মুসলিম পরস্পর বিরুদ্ধ নিজ সম্প্রদায়ের পুনর্জাগরণ ভাবনা সেক্যুলার রেনেসাঁস ভাবনার পথরোধ করে যাচ্ছিল বারবার। তাই নজরুলের পথ চলা ছিল দুর্গম গিরি অতিক্রম। কাব্য থেকে জীবন সর্বত্র এই অসম্প্রাদায়িক ভাবনাকে প্রতিষ্ঠা দেওয়ার সমস্ত প্রস্তুতিই তিনি নিয়েছিলেন। কাব্যে বিষয়, ভাব, ভাষা, ছন্দ, অলঙ্কার প্রয়োগ সর্বত্রই এক মিলন সাধনার সাধক হয়েছিলেন প্রাণের তাগিদে।

"ছন্দের ক্ষেত্রে নজরুল প্রধানত সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ ও রবীন্দ্রনাথের অনুগামী হলেও আরবী পারসী প্রভৃতি কয়েকটি বিদেশী ছন্দ তিনি বাঙলায় আমদানি করেন। ভাষার বিষয়ে আরবী, ফারসী, দেশী, গ্রাম্য কথা ইত্যাদি নানা রকমের শব্দসম্ভার ব্যবহার করে নজরুল বাঙলা ভাষাকে যে বলিষ্ঠ, দৃঢ় ও পৌরুষদীপ্ত রূপ দিয়েছেন তার তুলনা মেলা ভার। সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ ও মোহিতলাল এ বিষয়ে নজরুলের পূর্বসূরী হলেও তিনি যে তাঁদের বহুলাংশে অতিক্রম করে গেছেন সে কথা অনস্বীকার্য। কোমলকান্ত ও ললিতমধুর বাঙলা কবিতার ভাষা যে এত সংগ্রামশীল ও শক্তিশালী হতে পারে, তা নজরুলের কবিতা না পড়লে বোঝা যায় না। (গুপ্ত, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, ১৯৯৭, পৃ: ৩৪৪) নিঃসন্দিগ্ধ চিত্তে এ সিদ্ধান্ত করা যায় যে, ভাষা-ছন্দ-অলংকারে এবং রসসৃষ্টিনৈপুণ্যে নজরুল হিন্দু ও মুসমান সংস্কৃতির অপূর্ব মিলন ঘটিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু এই সৌন্দর্য রচনা কী কেবল ছন্দ ও ভাষার জ্ঞান এবং কলাকৌশলের দক্ষতা আয়ত্ত করতে পারলেই সম্ভবপর হবে? এ প্রসঙ্গে নজরুলের উপলব্ধির গভীরতা ও অনুভবশীলতার দিকটিকে স্পষ্ট করেছেন কালিদাস রায়। "কেবল উভয় সংস্কৃতি সম্বন্ধে জ্ঞান থাকলেই এটা সম্ভব হয় না। কাজীর চেয়ে উভয় সংস্কৃতি সম্বন্ধে হয়তো অনেকের ঢের বেশী জ্ঞান আছে কিন্তু উভয় সংস্কৃতির প্রতি এত দরদ, এত উদার সর্ব-সংস্কারমুক্ত মন আর কার আছে? প্রকৃত কবির চিত্ত সর্ব-সংস্কারমুক্ত। কাজী সে চিত্তের অধিকারী বলেই কাব্যের দরবারে হিন্দু-মুসলমানের মিলন ঘটাতে পেরেছে। (ফজল, রচনাবলী, বইঘর, চট্টগ্রাম, ১৩৮২ বঙ্গাব্দ, পৃ: ৫৩৮) কাজী নজরুল সম্পর্কে আলোচনা করতে গেলে তাঁর সম্পর্কে উল্লিখিত এই মূল্যায়নগুলিকে সামনে রাখতে হয়। সমকালীন আধুনিক কবিদের মধ্যে অনেকেই

নজরুলের দ্বারা প্রভাবিত হয়েছিলেন। জীবনানন্দ দাশ, প্রেমেন্দ্র মিত্র, বুদ্ধদেব বসু, সুকান্ত ভট্টাচার্য, সুভাষ মুখোপাধ্যায় প্রমুখ ব্যক্তিত্ব এক্ষেত্রে স্মরণযোগ্য। রাজনৈতিক ঘটনাবলী এবং তত্ত্বগত ভাবনা কবিতার মধ্যে যুক্ত করার কৃতিত্ব বাংলা কাব্যে নজরুলেরই। আধুনিকতার একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দিক হল তা জাগরণের, অনুপ্রেরণা ও আশার কথা বলে। নজরুলের কাব্য-সঙ্গীত-প্রবন্ধ সেই সংগ্রাম, সম্ভাবনা ও জীবনাকাঙ্ক্ষাকে তুলে ধরে।

VI

উপসংহার

শব্দ চয়ন, চিত্রনির্মাণ ক্ষমতা, মনোগ্রাহী কল্পনা, নাটকীয়তা, রূপরচনা, উপমা ব্যবহার, পুরাণের অনুষঙ্গ ইত্যাদি সৃষ্টিতে নজরুল ছিলেন এক পাকা কারিগর। সমালোচকদের মতে, নজরুল উচ্ছ্বাসপ্রবণ, তাঁর রচনাশৈলীতে বাঁধুনির অভাব। যদিও যুক্তির নিরিখে নজরুলের প্রশ্নে সবাই তা মেনে নেবেন না। প্রশ্ন আসে, শৃঙ্খলা মেনে চলা, ভাবের সংযম রক্ষা, উচ্ছ্বাসের নিয়ন্ত্রণ থাকলেই কি সাহিত্যের মানদন্ডে উত্তীর্ণ হওয়া সম্ভব? নজরুল নিজেই এগুলো ভেঙেছেন। তা ভেঙেছেন শিল্পীর মেজাজ নিয়েই। নতুন করে গড়তে গেলে তো ভাঙতে হবেই। পুরনো মৌতাতে আটকে না থেকে, মোহময় শৃংখল-জাল ছিন্ন করে নজরুল নিজে বেরিয়ে আসতে পেরেছিলেন। তার উত্তেজনা, অস্থিরতা, উন্মাদনায় ভীত সন্ত্রস্ত হয়েছিলেন অনেকেই। এ তো হওয়ারই কথা ছিল। নজরুলের সমস্ত সৃষ্টির মূলে ছিল বন্ধন মুক্তির আবেগ এবং প্রতিস্পর্ধা। প্রতিবাদের গমক সৃষ্টিতে যেমন যেমন শব্দ-ঝংকারের প্রয়োজন হয়েছে, তেমন তেমন ভাবেই সেগুলিকে সাঙ্গীকৃত করে নিয়েছিলেন। তাঁর আমিত্বকে চেনাতে পেরেছিলেন। এভাবেই আধুনিকতার জয়গান গেয়েছিলেন। এই নজরুলকে অস্বীকার করার কোনো উপায় নেই। প্রবন্ধের মধ্যে যুক্তি-শৃঙ্খলা, বিচারবোধ, মননশীলতা, যা একান্তই কাম্য, তার রসময় প্রকাশ নজরুলের প্রবন্ধ সাহিত্যের অন্যতম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সাফল্য। প্রবন্ধের বিন্যাস, পরিচ্ছেদ বিভাজন এবং ভাবের প্রবাহকে গতিশীল করে দেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে তিনি কোথাও বাধা সৃষ্টি করেননি। তাই তাঁর প্রবন্ধাবলী বাংলা সাহিত্যে ভিন্ন মাত্রা তুলে এনেছে। জাতি, সমাজ, রাজনীতির দ্বন্দ্ব- সংঘাত, শোষণ - নিপীড়ন, পরাধীনতার গ্লানি, আত্মযন্ত্রণা, সংস্কৃতি ও মানবতাবাদের সুর খুঁজে পেতে নজরুলের এই প্রবন্ধগুলি সাহায্য করবে।

তথ্যসূত্র:

১। ইসলাম, ন. (২০০১)। প্রত্যভিভাষণ, কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম রচনা সমগ্র,দ্বিতীয় খন্ড ,পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি।

২। ইসলাম, ন.(২০০৫)। যুগবাণী, কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম রচনা সমগ্র, প্রথম খন্ড, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাংলা আকাদেমি।

৩। চট্টোপাধ্যায়, শ .(পৌষ ১৪০১)। শরৎ রচনাবলী, ৩য় খন্ড, নাথ পাবলিশিং।

৪। গুপ্ত, ড ,সুশীলকুমার .(১৯৯৭)। নজরুল চরিতমানস, দে'জ পাবলিশিং ।

৫। ফজল আ. (১৩৮২ বঙ্গাব্দ)। রচনাবলী, ১ম খন্ড, চট্টগ্রামবইঘর । ,

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অমর মিত্রের *ধনপতির চর* : নারীর ছয় মাসের পৃথিবী

শ্রাবন্তী মজুমদার[†]

সারসংক্ষেপ

ফ্যান্টাসি, অলীক জীবনবোধ অমর মিত্রের লেখায় বিশেষ ভাবে ধরা পড়েছে। কূর্ম অবতার এবং পৃথিবী সৃষ্টিতত্ত্ব লোককথায়, লোকমুখে যেভাবে প্রচার পেয়ে এসেছে তারই একটি ব্যাখ্যা খুঁজে পাওয়া যায় অমর মিত্রের *ধনপতির চর* (২০০৭) উপন্যাসে। ঈশ্বরের পৃথিবী, কথিত কাহিনি এবং কল্পনার বিন্যাস সম্মিলিত ভাবে আখ্যান নির্মাণে সহায়তাকরেছে। চর ভাসিয়ে বুড়ো কচ্ছপের ভেসে থাকার মধ্যে লেখক খুব সচেতন ভাবেই মিশিয়ে দিয়েছেন সাঁওতাল জাতির প্রচলিত লোকবিশ্বাসকে। তবে এক বিস্তৃত কুহকের খোলসে ধরা রয়েছে ধনপতির চরের বাস্তব চিত্র। শোষণ-বঞ্চনা, অবৈধ বিনিয়োগ, নারীপাচারচক্র যার কোনোটাই সমাজের কাছে কাম্য নয়, বাস্তবের আওতায় থেকে সেটাই যেন অবাস্তব অধিকারের দিকটিকে নির্দেশ করেছে। অমর মিত্র তাঁর এই উপন্যাসের মধ্য দিয়ে দেখান যে পৃথিবীর ধনতান্ত্রিক শক্তির চেয়ে ক্ষমতাবান আর কিছু নেই, নেই বলেই জেলেদের জীবিকাহীন করে ধনপতির চর কিনে নিতে পাড়ে 'গ্রিন উড' কোম্পানি। চরের নারীদেরলিখতে হয় আত্মবিক্রয়পত্র। চর ঘিরে পরিবেশ রক্ষার নামে যে ব্যবসা শুরু হয় তা আসলে মাল্টি-ন্যাশনাল কোম্পানিগুলির দালালি। অন্যদিকে চর থেকে এই উচ্ছেদ এ যেন সারা বিশ্বের গণ উচ্ছেদকেই নির্দেশ করে।

মূল শব্দ:

মিথ, পুরাণ, ফ্যান্টাসি, কিংবদন্তী ব্যবসা, নারী, লোকসংস্কৃতি, পরিবেশ ভাবনা, আধিপত্যবাদ, শাসন।

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ভূমিকা

আবিষ্কার এবং ফ্যান্টাসির মধ্য দিয়ে যেভাবে মানিক বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় পেয়েছিলেন ময়নাদ্বীপ, মার্কেজ পেয়েছিলেন কলোম্বিয়ার ক্যারাবিয়ান উপকূলের মাকোন্দো নামের অলীক এক নগর বা যে ভাবে টনি মরিসন গ্রামীণ প্রতিবেশের মধ্যে বেছে নিয়েছিলেন ছোট্ট নগর এবং সালমন রাশদি তাঁর উপন্যাসে খুঁজে নিয়েছেন লন্ডন, মুম্বই, নিউ-ইয়র্কের মতো প্রশস্ত নাগরিক এলাকা হয়তো বা ঠিক তেমন ভাবেই অমর মিত্রও খুঁজে নিয়েছেন তাঁর ধনপতির চর।

বঙ্গোপসাগরের কোলে ভেসে ওঠা ধনপতির চর এবং হার্মাদ পর্তুগীজ নগরের মধ্যবর্তী জার্নিজার্নিটাই বিভিন্ন লোককথার মধ্যে দিয়ে, জীবনযাপনের ভঙ্গির মধ্যে দিয়ে উঠে এসেছে *ধনপতির চর* (২০০৭) উপন্যাসে। বঙ্গোপসাগর থেকে আটলান্টিক সাগরের এই যাতায়াত কল্পনা আর বাস্তবের মধ্যে এক অলীক মায়া রচনা করেছে এবং 'লিসবোঁয়া' হল আটলান্টিক সাগর পাড়ের এক অবাস্তব, কল্পনা রক্ষিত নগর। যে নগরের কথা কোরাসের মতো ঘুরে ঘুরে এসেছে এই উপন্যাসে। সেই সূত্রে এসেছে শাসন, আধিপত্যবাদ এবং দেশ-বিদেশের লোকসংস্কৃতি। ধনপতিরচর সম্পর্কে অমর মিত্র বলেছেন—

> *দক্ষিণবঙ্গে একসময় পর্তুগিজ জলদস্যুরা দাপিয়ে বেড়িয়েছে। সমুদ্র নদী জল ছিল তাদের অধিকারে। এই পর্তুগীজ জলদস্যুদের পরিচয় স্পেনীয় আর্মাডা থেকে হার্মাদ হয়ে যায় বহুদিন আগে। সেই হাররমাদ জলদস্যুদের বংশধরকে আমি কল্পনা করেছি। লোকটি মনে মনে ভাবে, কল্পনা করে সে পর্তুগিজ রক্তের মানুষ। তার ভিতরে বইছে হার্মাদের রক্ত। সেই বুড়ো ধনপতি সর্দার ছ'মাসের পৃথিবীর অধীশ্বর।*[১]

বিশ্লেষণ

ঘোড়াদল অঞ্চল থেকে ছয় মাসের জন্যে কিছু জেলেরা এসে ধনপতিরচরে অর্ধেক জীবনের এক সংসার পাতে সেই সঙ্গে আসে দেহোপজীবিনী, লাঞ্ছিত-বঞ্চিত অসহায় নারীরা। তারা পরস্পর ধনপতির চরে এক চুক্তিবদ্ধ জীবনে আবদ্ধ হয়।ছয় মাসের দাম্পত্য সম্পর্ক রচনা করে তারা ভুলে থাকতে ভালোবাসে তাদের পূর্বপরিচয়। ছয়মাস কেটে গেলে আবার এই সব জেলে এবং অস্থায়ী জেলে বধুরা যে যার মতো আগের জীবনে ফিরে যায়,

দিনগুলো কাটে পথে পথে উঞ্ছবৃত্তি করে।ধনপতিরচরে সন্তান উৎপাদন নিসিদ্ধ। যদি সন্তানসম্ভবা হয়ও তবে তামোচনের জন্য ফিরে যেতে হয় ঘোড়াদলে। ঘোড়াদল থেকে এই চরের দূরত্ব নির্দিষ্ট করে কেউ জানে না। দূত্বটুকুই যেন এক কূহক, যা বাস্তবকে অতিক্রম করে এমন এক ধুসর জীবনে মেতে ওঠে যেখানে বছরের বাকি কাঙ্খিত ছটি মাস শুধু হাতছানি দিয়ে ডাক।অথচ চৈত্র মাস আসতেই ভাঙে সেই সুখের ঘর। জেলেরা ভুলে যায় চরের কথা। চুক্তিবদ্ধ চরবধুরা ভোলে না। তারা বাকি ছয় মাসের অপেক্ষায় বসে থাকে।

কাহিনি বর্ণিত হচ্ছে এমন একটা সময় থেকে যখন বৃদ্ধ, অশক্ত ধনপতি কার্যত তার দৃষ্টিশক্তি হারিয়ে ফেলেছে এবং একের পর এক 'বিবি' বদলে শেষতম বিবি 'সপ্তদশী' কুন্তিকে চরের দায়িত্ব দিয়ে ধনেশ্বরী করতে চাইছে। দক্ষিন বঙ্গের একটি চরে বাস করেও ধনপতি বারবার প্রমাণ করতে চায় সে পেদ্রুর বংশধর। বৃদ্ধ বয়সে এই অলীক কল্পকথা, বিভ্রমের গল্প দিয়ে একের পর এক বৃত্তান্ত তাকে বলে যেতে হয়—

> *অতলান্ত সাগর ধরে যখন আসি আমি, আমার পষ্ট মনে পড়ে কুন্তি, সাগরের জলে, ভেসেই চলেছি আমি ধনপতি পেদরু, পথমে ক'দিন ভাল গেল, রাতি আকাশে চাঁদ থাকে, পরে চাঁদের দিন গেল, চাঁদ নাই, সাগরে ঘোর আঁধার বটে, কিন্তু তারার আলো সব পষ্ট, জলের রঙ আবছা হলুদ।*[২]

ধনপতির বিবি কুন্তি এসব কথা শুনলেও মনে মনে সেওপ্রতিস্পর্ধী হয়ে ওঠে। সে চায় তার মতো অবহেলিত-লাঞ্ছিত নারীরাও ঘর পাক, একক পুরুষ নিয়ে জীবন কাটাক। তাই ধনপতির বিবি হবার কারণে তার যেটুকু ক্ষমতা তার সঙ্গে নিজস্ব নারীশক্তি দিয়ে সে লড়াই করে ছয়মাসের চরজীবনকে বারোম্যাসের পরিপূর্ণতা দিতে চায়। কুন্তিস্বপ্ন দেখেছে এই চর একদিন সেজে উঠবে স্বাভাবিক জীবনের ছন্দে। এই চরিত্রটির মধ্য দিয়ে অমর মিত্র বাস্তবতাকে অবাস্তবের আলোয় ব্যাখ্যা করতে চেয়েছেন। সে যেন পদ্মানদীর মাঝি উপন্যাসের কপিলার মত! আর হোসেন মিয়ার ময়না দ্বীপ যেন ধনপতির চর। তফাত এই যে হোসেন মিয়া চেয়েছিল নারী-পুরুষের মিলনে দ্বীপ সন্তান-সন্ততি, ব্যাবসাবাণিজ্যে ভরে উঠুক। কিন্তু ধনপতির চরের বুড়ো ধনপতি সর্দার কখনো চায়নি তার চরে কোনো স্থায়ী বসত গড়ে উঠুক বা কেউ সন্তান উৎপাদন করুক। ধনপতি চেয়েছে একটি প্রচলিত মিথকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখতে। ছমাসের সংসার দেবার পর ধনপতির চর পিঠে নেওয়া কূর্মকে বিশ্রাম দিতে চেয়ে এই চরকে শূন্য করে দিতে চেয়েছে। কুন্তি তা চায়নি, সে হাজার ছেলেমেয়ের মা হতে চেয়েছে, চরে

স্থায়ী জনবসতি গড়ে তুলতে চেয়েছে। স্কুলের সহজ পাঠের স্মৃতি ভেঙে কুন্তির মতো কিশোরী বধু খুব আবেগে কখনো কখনো ধনপতি সর্দারকে বলে উঠেছে— 'প্রভু, ঘুমালেই স্বপ্ন আসে, বকশিগঞ্জের পদ্মাপারে' বা 'দুপুরে স্বপন দেখি, তুমার চরে ঘর হয়েচে, পাকা ঘর, পাকা ছাদ, তুমার চরে ধান হয়েছে, পেকে হলুদ, তুমার চরে ছেলেপুলেরা খলখল করে জলের মতন নাচে।', 'ধনপতি প্রভু, কাল দুফরে স্বপন দেখেছি তুমার চরে মেলা বসেছে পোষ সংকেরান্তির, কত ব্যাপারি কত খদ্দের, কত সাধু, কত দুঃখ পাওয়া মানুষ!' কুন্তি যা স্বপ্ন দেখে তা আসলে এক হতে চাওয়া জীবনের না হয়ে ওঠা বিক্ষোভ, এক অপ্রাপ্তি বোধে পূর্ণ জীবনের বিরুদ্ধে বিদ্রোহ।ধনপতি কুন্তির বাসনাকে প্রশ্রয় দিয়েছে। তাকেবুঝিয়েছে—

> *এই চর, এই সব মাছমারা, মাছমারাদের বিবি, দোকানদারি, নদীঘাট, তারপর বড় গাং, গাঙের পানি, গাঙের মাছ, মাছের ঝালা—সব যেমন আমার তেমনি সব তোর হবে। ... হ্যাঁ আর ধনপতি চাইনে, এখন চাদ্দিকে মেয়েছেলের শাসন তো হচ্ছে, ইন্দিরা গান্ধীর শাসন কি ছিল না?... আমি তোরে সব বুঝায়ে দেব কী করে চরডা নিজির মত করে রাখতি হয়, আমার পূর্বপুরুষ, পেদরু সাতগাঁ বন্দরে দেখেছিল ওইরকম এক মেয়েছেলে মালকিন, কী তার দাপট, তুই সেইরকম হবি, তোরে সেই রকম করে যাব আমি।*[৩]১৫৫ পৃ।

পিতৃ-মাতৃহীন বছর পনেরর কুন্তিকে ভ্রাম্যমান ঘুরতে দেখে বৃদ্ধ ধনপতি সর্দার তাকে যেমন বিবি করে নিয়ে এসেছিল কনস্টেবল বা ব্যাপারিও যে একদিন কুন্তিকে এখান থেকে নিয়ে যাবে সেটাই যেন এই দ্বীপের ঐতিহ্য। তাই সে চায় তার সবটুকু শক্তি দিয়ে ধনপতির চরকে টিকিয়ে রাখতে, সর্দারের স্ত্রীর ভূমিকায় অবতীর্ন হয়ে সে চায় কর্তৃত্ব করতে। এমনকী সে পুরুষের লোলুপ দৃষ্টি থেকে নিজেকে বাঁচাতে এক প্রতিরোধ গড়ে তোলে নিজেই। সে ডাকিনি বলে মিথ্যে গুজব ছড়ায়, সে তার ডাকিনি বিদ্যাকে আরো প্রখর করতে কামরূক কামাখ্যায় যাবে বলেও সাধারণ পুরুষের মধ্যে ভয়ের সঞ্চার করে।কুন্তির মতোই আর এক নারী বাতাসি। শেষ ছটি মাস বাতাসির খুব কষ্টে কেটেছে। কখনো কলকাতার ফুটপাথে রাত জেগে, কখনো এক রিকশাওয়ালার ঝুপড়িতে কাটিয়ে রুগ্ন শ্রান্ত হয়ে আবার ঘোড়াদলে ফিরে গনেশ জেলের ছমাসের বউ সেজেছে।বাতাসিও স্বপ্ন দেখে তার ছয় মাসের পৃথিবী বারো মাসে পূর্ণতা পাবে, তাকে আর বাকি ছয় মাসের জন্য ভাবতে হবে না। তারও ভিটে হবে। উঠোন হবে, গোয়াল-গরু-বাছুর, জমি-ধানের গোলা, আলতা-সিঁদুর

সহ লক্ষ্মী অধীষ্ঠান করবেন তার সংসারে। বাতাসির এই স্বপ্নে মুকুরিত হয়েছে প্রতিটি নারীর মনে লুকিয়ে থাকা এক সনাতন ইচ্ছে।

অথচ বাতাসিদের কাছে মূল ভূখণ্ড থেকেও দালাল আসে, কনস্টেবল মঙ্গল মিদ্যে এবং ব্যাপারী দশরথ নিয়মিত এসে তাদের বিক্রি করে দেওয়ার ভয় দেখায়।চরকে কেন্দ্র করেপ্রশাসন এবং নারীব্যবসায়ীরা জঘন্য উন্মাদনায় মেতে ওঠে।প্রেজেন্টেবল এবং মুনাফার কথা ভেবে তারা বাতাসিকে গন্ধ তেল সাবান শ্যাম্পু দিয়ে যায়। যে চরে জন্ম-মৃত্যুর হিসেব কেউ রাখে না সেখান থেকে একটি মেয়েকে ঘষে মেজে যদি একবার ভুটভুটি নৌকোয় তোলা যায় তবে তার অন্তিম গন্তব্য কলকাতা-হাওড়া হয়ে ভারতবর্ষের কোনও নিষিদ্ধ পল্লিতে। বয়স যদি একটু কম হয় তাহলে আরবদেশেও পাচার হয়ে যেতে পারে। এই অন্ধকার জীবনের ভয় বাতাসিদের তাড়া করে বেড়ায়। তাই আত্ম রক্ষার্থে বাতাসি মেছোগন্ধকে আঁকড়ে ধরে, বেশি করে পোড়া মাছ খায়, কাপড় কাচে না, স্নান করে না।শিকড়হীন পরপুরুষ আশ্রয়ী হলেও তার নীতি থেকে সে বিচ্যুত হয় না। অথচ জমি, চরের মতো সেও একদিন বিক্রি হয়ে যায়। সরকারকে সাক্ষী রেখে দলিলি ভাষায় যেভাবে জমি হস্তান্তরিত হয়ে যায় সেভাবেই নারী শরীরও বিক্রি হিয়ে যায়। অনেক সময় জমির মালিক যেমন জানতেও পারে না তার জমিটি বেহাত হয়ে গেছে ঠিক তেমনি নারীও জানে না তার শরীর কখন বিক্রি হয়ে গেছে অন্য কোনও দালালের হাতে। এই বিক্রীত হয়ে যাওয়া নারীকেই আত্মবিক্রয় পত্র লিখে দিতে হয়, যেভাবে জমির মালিক লিখে থাকেন দানপত্র।

চরে থেকে যেমন মনে হয় জল আর জল, তার সীমা পরিসীমা নেই। ঠিক তেমনি ঘোড়াদলে থেকে যে মাটির পৃথিবী আরম্ভ হয়ে যায় তারও সীমা-পরিসীমা কোথাও নির্দেশিত নেই। সান্মাষিকদাম্পত্যের মেয়াদ ফুরিয়ে গেলে বিভিন্ন গঞ্জে-শহরে গা ঢাকে দিয়ে কাটিয়ে দেয় বাতাসিরা। তাদের চাতুর্যের কাছে হেরে যায় মঙ্গল মিদ্যে ব্যাপারী দশরথ সিং বা নবদ্বীপ মালাকার। তাদের কারো পক্ষেই সেই সিজনে কোনও মেয়ে মানুষ তোলা সম্ভব হয় না। একটি নারীকেও তারা পাচার করতে পারে না। তাদের নাপারার আক্ষেপ দোষারোপ করে একবিংশ শতককে। হার্মাদ ফিরিঙ্গির যুগে জাহাজে বা নৌকোর খোলে হাত পা বেঁধে লুট করা নারী নিয়ে যে

ব্যবসা চলত তা একবিংশ শতকের কম্পিউটারের যুগে খুব সহজ নয় বলেও আক্ষেপ করে। তাদের কথাবার্তায় নারী পাচার চক্রের অন্ধকার ছবি ভেসে ওঠে—

> *কম্পিউটারে সব ডাটা ঢুকে যাচ্ছে। কম্পিউটার থেকেই বেরিয়ে আসবে প্রাইস লিস্ট--- মূল্য তালিকা। সেই মতো বেচাকেনা হবে। এর ভিতরে মেয়েমানুষের বিজন্স সবচেয়ে সম্ভাবনাময়... আগে যা হতো লুকিয়ে হতো। এখন রীতিমতো বাজার খুলে দেওয়া হয়েছে। ফিগার, বয়স, মুখশ্রী বুঝে বুঝে দাম ঠিক করা হয়েছে। মধ্যযুগে যেমন ক্রীতদাসীর বাজার বসত, এখন সেইটেকেই আরো আধুনিকভাবে করা হয়েছে...। ওই কারণেই বেওয়ারিশ মেয়েমানুষ, সেক্স ওয়ার্কার চাই, বাজারে প্রচুর টাকা, প্রচুর ডলার, ইউরো, তুলে আনতে হবে।* [৪]২৯৩-৯৪

শুধু তাই নয় এক দল মাছমারা ও ভবঘুরে নারীর জীবনকে মিলিয়ে প্রস্টিটিউশান এবং যৌনরোগের ইঙ্গিত, গাছপালা সহ পরিবেশের ভারসাম্যহীনতা প্রভৃতি অভিযোগ তুলে প্রশাসন একটা সময় চর নিসিদ্ধ করে দেয়। ধনেশ্বরীর চর রক্ষা করার আর্জি জানায়, আবেদনপত্র লেখে জেলাশাসকের কাছে। বহুজাতিক ট্যুরিজম কোম্পানিওহাত বাড়ায় ধনপতির চরের দিকে। দ্বীপ যখন রূপান্তরিত হবেরিসর্টে তখনই জিতে যাবে উন্মাদের দল, রমরমিয়ে চালাবে দালালি, অবাধ যৌনতা, দেহব্যাবসা। শুধু মাত্র ফুর্তির জন্য বিক্রি হয়ে যায় বছর বছরের আশ্রয়, কল্পনা, মিথ। এসব ডামাডোলের মধ্যে যখন পুনরায় আশ্বিন মাস আসে সাবিত্রী বাতাসি যমুনারাও ফিরে আসে। ঘটনাচক্রে চর অধিগ্রহণের ঠিক আগের কার্তিক পূর্ণিমায় অসহায় নারীদল মাটি দিয়ে কাছিম সদ্দারের মূর্তি গড়তে থাকে। পুজার আয়োজন করে। এই পূজা কেবল বারোমাসের পূর্ণতার জন্য নয় বরং ধনপতি কাছিম সর্দারের ঘুম ভাঙিয়ে চর নিয়ে বিলীন হয়ে যাওয়ারআকাঙ্খায়ও।কাছিম সর্দারকে মাটি আর অসহায় মন নিয়ে যেভাবে গড়ে তোলে পূর্ণিমার আলোয় তা আশার পাশাপাশি এক ভয়েরও জন্ম দেয়, জন্ম দেয় অনিশ্চয়ের। প্রচলিত মিথ বাঁচিয়ে রাখতে গিয়ে এই নারীরা নিজেদেরই যেন সমর্পণ করে দেয়। আসলে কিংবদন্তী, পুরাকথা বা মিথ যে নামেই তা ব্যাখ্যায়িত হোক না কেন তা কোথাও যেন একটা আশঙ্কারও নির্দেশ দেয়। এই প্রসঙ্গে উল্লেখ করা যেতে পাড়ে মির্চা এলিয়াদের কয়েকটি কথা—

> Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the

deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality --- an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution.[৫]

ধনপতির চরের সৃষ্টি রহস্যের প্রেক্ষিত হিসেবে অমর মিত্র মিথ এবং প্রচলিত আদিবাসী পুরাণ কথাকে ব্যবহার করেছেন। খুব সচেতন ভাবেই তিনি নানা দেশের আদিবাসী জীবনে প্রচলিত জন্মকথাকে গ্রহণ করেছেন। হার্মাদের বংশধর এবং সাগরপাড়ের লিসবোঁয়ার কিংবদন্তীর সঙ্গে কূর্মের নামে বুড়ো হার্মাদের এই নামকরণের মধ্যে লেখক লুকিয়ে রেখেছেন সৃষ্টিতত্ত্ব-টোটেমএর ছায়া। বৃদ্ধ ধনপতির সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তার জন্ম রহস্য, অবস্থা, ব্যাপ্তির ছক ভেঙে নতুন বৃত্তান্তের জন্ম দিয়েছে। ধনপতি যে ভাষায়, যে ভাবে, যে বাস্তব পরিবেশে তার বৃত্তান্ত বর্ণনা করে যে তা এক অবাস্তব পরিসর নির্মাণ করে তোলে। সর্বোপরি বিভ্রমে ভর করে পাঠক এক ফ্যান্টাসির জগতে পৌঁছে যান। নারীকে বারবার আলোকিত করতে চেয়েই অমর মিত্র একে একে তুলে আনেন বাতাসি, কুন্তি, সাবিত্রীদের।নারীপাচার, দ্বীপভূমির উচ্ছেদ এসবই অমর মিত্রকে ব্যথিত করে। লেখক বলেন—

দক্ষিণ ২৪ পরগণা জেলায় সাগরদ্বীপে সাহারা কোম্পানি একটি ট্যুরিজম ইন্ডাস্ট্রি গড়ে তোলার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিল। নদী, সাগর,দ্বীপকে তারা ব্যবহার করবে ভ্রমণ শিল্পে। তার জন্য যা যা করতে হয় করবে। কোনো এক বছর আজকাল শারদীয়াতে ব্যাঙ্কক এর ট্যুরিজম শিল্প নিয়ে বেশ বড়ো একটা লেখা পড়েছিলাম। মনে হয়েছিল খুবই যুক্তিগ্রাহ্য। থাইল্যান্ড বদলে গেছে। গোটা দেশটা চলে ট্যুরিজমের উপর নির্ভর করে। থাই মেয়েরা দেহপোজিবিনী হয়ে গেছে। নানা যৌন রোগ ছড়াচ্ছে, কী ভয়ানক হয়ে গেছে দেশটা। আর ফূর্তিটা মেয়েমানুষের মাংশ নিয়ে যা ওখানে খুব সুলভ হয়ে গেছে ট্যুরিজমের কল্যাণে। সাহারা ইন্ডিয়ার প্রস্তাব নিয়ে উচ্ছ্বাস দেখা দিয়েছিল। আমি মনে মনে ভীত হয়েছিলাম। ... আমি একটা সময় নৈরাশ্যপীড়িত হয়ে পড়েছিলাম... আমার দেশটা ব্যাঙ্কক হয়ে যাবে আমরা কিছু করতে পারব না। মনে হয়েছিল এ থেকে বাঁচার উপায় কী? জানতাম না। বাঁচার উপায় একটাই তা হল প্রতিরোধ।[৫]

পর্তুগাল থেকে বঙ্গোপসাগরের এই যে যাত্রাপথ তা শতাব্দী থেকে শতাব্দী পেরিয়ে বিংশ শতকের মহিলা প্রধানমন্ত্রী শাসিত ভারতবর্ষের দিকে যাত্রা করে। ধনপতির ইচ্ছে ছিল ইন্দিরা গান্ধী যেমন ইন্ডিয়া শাসন

করেছিলেন তেমনি কুন্তিও চর শাসন করুক অথচ কুন্তি জানতই না 'ইন্ডিয়া কুথায়?' আরণ্যকের ভানুমতি বা ধনপতির চরের কুন্তি কোথাও যেন মিলে যায়। তাদের দেশ কোথায় তারা যানে না।চরভূমি প্রতিদিনই বিন্দু বিন্দু করে সরে যেতে থাকে সমুদ্রের দিকে--- ঠিক যেন প্রাচীন সেই ঘুমন্ত কূর্মটি যেন তার আজন্ম অভ্যাসেই জলের দিকে সরে গিয়েছিল তেমন করেই যেন বা এই নারীদলের জীবন হারিয়ে যেতে থাকে মহাজীবনের খোঁজে।

তথ্যসূত্র :

১। বিকাশ রায়, বিদ্যুৎ মণ্ডল (সম্পাদিত),*সাক্ষাৎকার সংগ্রহ,* রবি প্রকাশনী, প্রথম প্রকাশ, ২০১৯, পৃষ্ঠা-১৪২।

২।অমর মিত্র, *ধনপতির চর,* দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, প্রথম প্রকাশ ২০০৭, পৃ-১০৯।

৩। প্রাগুক্ত, পৃষ্ঠা-১৫৫।

৪। পৃ – ২৯৪।

৫। Eliade Mircea(1964), Myth and Reality, Allen & Unwin, ISBN 978-0-04-291001-7, pp. 5-6.

৫। বিকাশ রায়, বিদ্যুৎ মণ্ডল (সম্পাদিত),*সাক্ষাৎকার সংগ্রহ,* রবি প্রকাশনী, প্রথম প্রকাশ, ২০১৯, পৃষ্ঠা- ১৮৪-১৮৫।

আকরগ্রন্থ :

১। অমর মিত্র, *ধনপতির চর,* দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, প্রথম প্রকাশ ২০০৭।

২। মানবেন্দ্র বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, *ল্যাটিন আমেরিকার উপন্যাস সংগ্রহ,* উৎসর্গ পত্র, দে'জ পাবলিকেশন, কলকাতা, প্রথম প্রকাশ ১৪২০।

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রবীন্দ্রসাহিত্যে প্রেমচেতনার আধুনিকতা : প্রসঙ্গ "শেষের কবিতা"

শিখা ঘোষ[†]

বিষয়-চুম্বক :

বাংলা সাহিত্যাকাশের ধ্রুবতারা রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর এবং তাঁর রচনা কেবল আধুনিক নয়— অনেকাংশেই অত্যাধুনিক। রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর হলেন সেই শাশ্বত স্রষ্টা যাঁর সৃষ্টি সমকালকে ছাপিয়ে হয়ে উঠেছে চিরকালীন। সাহিত্যের এমনই এক শাশ্বত প্রকরণ হল প্রেম। এই প্রেমচেতনার প্রকাশে রবীন্দ্রসাহিত্যে প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে এক আধুনিক মনন। রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুরের মনন ও তাঁর সৃষ্ট সাহিত্যের আধুনিকতার প্রতিফলন কীভাবে 'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসে প্রকাশিত হয়েছে তাই আমার প্রবন্ধের মূল আলোচ্য বিষয়।

সূচক-শব্দ : রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, সাহিত্যে আধুনিকতা, আধুনিক মনন, প্রেম, বন্ধনহীনতা, নতুনের বার্তাবাহী।

বাংলার সহিত্যাকাশের উজ্জ্বলতম নক্ষএ আমাদের প্রিয় রবি— কবিগুরু রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর। তাঁর সৃষ্ট সাহিত্যের আধুনিকতার বোধ নিয়ে বিশিষ্ট রবীন্দ্রগষেকগণ নানা প্রতর্ক ও প্রবন্ধ রচনা করেছেন। তাঁদের মধ্যে বিশেষভাবে স্মরণীয় আবু সয়ীদ আইয়ুব রচিত 'আধুনিকতা ও রবীন্দ্রনাথ' গ্রন্থটি। তবে বিশ্বকবি রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর এবং তাঁর রচনা কেবল আধুনিক নয়— অনেকাংশেই অত্যাধুনিক। আসলে আধুনিকতা বিষয়টি সময় নিয়ে নয়, মর্জি নিয়ে— একথা অনেকাংশেই সত্য। কারণ একই সময়ে সৃষ্ট বিভিন্ন সাহিত্যিকের রচনার ভাব, ভাষা, ভঙ্গি, চিন্তা-চেতনার মধ্যে বিস্তর ফারাক দৃষ্ট হয়। বর্তমানে দাঁড়িয়ে যাকে চরমতম আধুনিক বলে মনে হয়, কালপ্রবাহে তাই হয়ে দাঁড়ায় সেকেলে। কিন্তু কোনো কোনো সাহিত্যিক এমনই হন, যাঁদের সৃষ্টি

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সমকালকে ছাপিয়ে হয়ে ওঠে শাশ্বত বা চিরকালীন। রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর সেই শাশ্বত স্রষ্টা। সাহিত্যের এমনই এক শাশ্বত প্রকরণ হল প্রেম। এই প্রেমচেতনার প্রকাশে রবীন্দ্রসাহিত্যে কতখানি আধুনিক মনন প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে তাই আমার প্রবন্ধের মূল আলোচ্য বিষয়। আর বিষয়ের আধেয় রবীন্দ্র উপন্যাস 'শেষের কবিতা'।

প্রেমসম্পর্কে আধুনিকতার বীজবপন করেছিলেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ তাঁর 'চোখের বালি' উপন্যাসে মহেন্দ্র-বিনোদিনী-বিহারীর ত্রিকোণ প্রেম সম্পর্কে সূচনা দিয়ে। যদিও বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র এর পূর্বেই 'বিষবৃক্ষ' উপন্যাসে এই ত্রিকোণ প্রেমের আখ্যান রচনা করেছিলেন, কিংবা 'কৃষ্ণকান্তের উইল' উপন্যাসের ভ্রমর গোবিন্দলাল ও রোহিণীর সম্পর্কের জটিলতা তৈরি হয়েছিল, তবুও নীতিবাগীশ বঙ্কিম তাঁর নায়িকাদের আত্মহত্যা কিংবা গুলি করে হত্যার মধ্যে দিয়ে মৃত্যু পরিণতি দিয়েছিলেন, সেখানে রবীন্দ্রনাথ 'চোখের বালি' -তে বিনোদিনীকে কাশীবাসী করলেন, মৃত্যুদণ্ডের পরিবর্তে। 'যোগাযোগ' উপন্যাসের চরম আধুনিক মানসিকতার কুমুদিনীও শেষ পর্যন্ত মাতৃত্বের কারণে মধুসূদনের বিত্ত ও ভোগের পায়ে আত্মসম্পর্ণ করতে বাধ্য হয়। অথচ একই সালে (১৯২৯ খ্রিস্টাব্দে) প্রকাশিত 'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসে রবীন্দ্রনাথ আধুনিক নর-নারীর প্রেম সম্পর্কিত ভাবনাকে এক গদ্য-পদ্যের মিলিত শব্দবন্ধে, ঝাঁ-চকচকে বাচন্‌ভঙ্গিতে যেভাবে তুলে ধরলেন তাঁর আটষট্টি বছর বয়সের রচনায় তা সমগ্র বাংলা সাহিত্যে অভিনব।

'শেষের কবিতা' গ্রন্থাকারে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল ১৩৩৬ সালের ভাদ্র মাসে। ১৩৩৫ সালে ভাদ্র থেকে চৈত্র পর্যন্ত আট মাস ধরে গ্রন্থটি ধারাবাহিকভাবে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল 'প্রবাসী' পত্রিকায়। আর এটি রচিত হয়েছিল তারও কয়েকমাস পূর্বে কবির দাক্ষিণাত্য ভ্রমণ কালে। বইটির নাম ছিল তখন—'মিতা'। সম্ভবত কবি এই উপন্যাস রচনা শুরু করেন ইংরেজি ১৯২৮ সালের মে মাসের তৃতীয় সপ্তাহে কুন্নুরে এবং সমাপ্তি ২৫ জুন ব্যাঙ্গালোরে আচার্য ব্রজেন্দ্রনাথ শীলের আতিথ্যে, তাঁর ব্যালাব্রুয়ি' নিকেতনে। শ্রীমতী নির্মলকুমারী মহলানবীশ রচিত 'কবির সঙ্গে দাক্ষিণাত্যে' নামক গ্রন্থ থেকে এই উপন্যাস রচনার প্রেক্ষাপট জানা যায়।

যদিও এই গল্পের সঙ্গে উপন্যাসের বিস্তর পার্থক্য, মিল কেবল শিলং পাহাড়ে মোটর দুর্ঘটনা এবং রোমাণ্টিক প্রেমের আমেজ টুকুতেই।

এই উপন্যাসে রবীন্দ্রনাথ অমিত-লাবণ্য-কেতকী-শোভনলাল মূলত এই চার চরিত্রের মধ্য দিয়ে প্রেমের এক আধুনিক মনোভাবনা তুলে ধরেছেন অমিত-লাবণ্যর একে-অপরকে ভালোবাসা এবং ভালোবেসেই দূরে চলে যাওয়ার মধ্য দিয়ে বন্ধনহীন প্রেমের গ্রন্থি রচিত হয়েছে। তাই অমিত ফিরে গেছে কেতকীর কাছে, আর লাবণ্য-শোভনলালের কাছে। অমিতর মনে হয়েছে কেতকীর সঙ্গে তার ভালোবাসারই সম্বন্ধ, সে যেন তার ঘড়ায় তোলা জল—যা প্রতিদিনের ব্যবহার্য; কিন্তু লাবণ্য হল তার ভালোবাসার দীঘি—যেখানে তার মন সাঁতার দেবে। তাই তার ভালোবাসার বাসা আর ওড়ার আকাশ একসঙ্গেই থাকল। প্রেমের পরিণতি সম্বন্ধে এমন কথা আধুনিকতম মানুষকেও ভাবায়—যা রবীন্দ্রনাথ ১৯২৯-এ 'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসে বললেন। এ প্রসঙ্গে সুজয় বসাক বলেছেন—

> "নরনারীর প্রেমের প্রাত্যহিক রূপ ও তার লোকোত্তর শাশ্বত অনুভব—এই দুইয়ের দ্বন্দ্বময় জিজ্ঞাসা রবীন্দ্র চেতনার এক বিশিষ্ট মাত্রা। অস্থির আবেগময় অমিত ও শেষপর্যন্ত প্রেমের সংঘাতে অপ্রাপ্তির বেদনায় উপন্যাসের পরিণামে নবতমবোধে সুস্থির হয়।
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> প্রেম বিবাহে পরিণতি না পেলেও ক্ষতি নেই—এই তত্ত্ব যেমন 'শেষের কবিতা'য় প্রতিফলিত হয়, তেমনি বিবাহোত্তর প্রেমের কথাও আছে। অবশ্য এই উপন্যাসে রবীন্দ্রনাথ রক্ষণশীলও বটে; কেননা, নায়ক-নায়িকারা দেহের বহিরঙ্গে আবেগ ঘন সান্নিধ্যে বা মিলনে সন্তুষ্ট থেকেছে। এই কথা উগ্র আধুনিক অমিত রায়ের পক্ষেও সত্য। আসলে রবীন্দ্রনাথের এই সীমাবদ্ধতা আধুনিকতার পর্বে উপনীত হয়েও রক্ষণশীলতাকে মুছে ফেলতে পারে না। অবশ্য অতিঅগ্রসরতা হয়তো অতি আধুনিকতা যা রবীন্দ্রনাথ মেনে নিতে পারেন নি।" (বসাক,১৯৭০,পৃ. ১৩৭)

'শেষের কবিতা'র অভিনবত্ব বা আধুনিকতা প্রকাশিত হয়েছে এর ভাষাভঙ্গিতে। অমিত রায় হয়েছে অমিট রায়ে (রে)। কেতকী হল কেটি। ইংরেজিয়ানার প্রভাব সর্বত্র। অমিত নবীন লেখক, সে বলে—'ফ্যাশানটা হল মুখোশ, স্টাইলটা মুখশ্রী'। অমিত-র ধুতি পাঞ্জাবি, পায়ে সাদা চামড়ার ওপর লাল চামড়ার কটকি জুতো, কোমরের ট্যাঁকঘড়ি, কাঁধের মাদ্রাজি চাদর আর ইংরেজি-বাংলা মেশানো মুখের বুলি—সবমিলিয়েই সে অভিনব।

শুধু অমিতর নয়, তার বোন সিসি ও লিসির যে বর্ণনা রবীন্দ্রনাথ দিয়েছেন সেখানেও তাঁর আধুনিক বিচক্ষণ দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিই প্রকাশিত—

"এদিকে ওর দুই বোন, যাদের ডাক নাম সিসি এবং লিসি, যেন নতুন বাজারে অত্যন্ত হালের আমদানি—ফ্যাশানের পসরায় আপাদমস্তক যত্নে মোড়ক-করা পয়লা নম্বরের প্যাকেট-বিশেষ। উঁচু খুরওয়ালা জুতো, লেসওয়ালা বুক কাটা জ্যাকেটের ফাঁকে প্রবালে অ্যাম্বারে মেশানো মালা, শাড়িটা গায়ে তির্যগ্‌ভঙ্গিতে আঁট করে ল্যাপ্‌টানো। এরা খুট খুট করে দ্রুত লয়ে চলে; উচ্চৈঃস্বরে বলে; স্তরে স্তরে তোলে সূক্ষ্মাগ্র হাসি, মুখ ঈষৎ বেঁকিয়ে স্মিতহাস্যে উঁচু কটাক্ষে চায়, জানে কাকে বলে ভাবগর্ভ চাউনি; গোলাপি রেশমের পাখা ক্ষণে ক্ষণে গালের কাছে ফুর ফুর করে সঞ্চালন করে, এবং পুরুষবন্ধুর চৌকির হাতার উপরে বসে সেই পাখার আঘাতে তাদের কৃত্রিম তর্জন প্রকাশ পেতে থাকে।" (রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, নবম খন্ড, পৃ. ৫০৮)

'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসের উক্তিগুলোর মধ্যেও এক অদ্ভুত মাদকতা আছে, যা অত্যন্ত অভিনব। অমিতর মধ্য দিয়ে রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর তাঁর সমকালে রবীন্দ্রসমালোচকদের মানসিকতার প্রতি তীব্র কটাক্ষ তুলে ধরেছেন, আত্মসমালোচনার চুলচেরা বিশ্লেষণ করেছেন—

> 'একদিন ওদের বালিগঞ্জের এক সাহিত্যসভায় রবি ঠাকুরের কবিতা ছিল আলোচনার বিষয়। অমিতর জীবনে এই সে প্রথম সভাপতি হতে রাজি হয়েছিল; গিয়েছিল মনে মনে যুদ্ধসাজ প'রে।...

সভাপতি উঠে বললেন, "কবিমাত্রের উচিৎ পাঁচ-বছর মেয়াদে কবিত্ব করা, পঁচিশ থেকে ত্রিশ পর্যন্ত। একথা বলব না যে, পরবর্তীদের কাছ থেকে আরো ভালো কিছু চাই, বলব অন্য কিছু চাই। ফজলি আম ফুরোলে বলব না, আনো ফজলিতর আম।" বলব, 'নতুন বাজার থেকে বড়ো দেখে আতা নিয়ে এসো তো হে।"... রবি ঠাকুরের বিরুদ্ধে সবচেয়ে বড়ো নালিশ এই যে, বুড়ো ও ওঅর্ড্‌স ওঅর্থের নকল করে ভদ্রলোক অতি অন্যায়রকম বেঁচে আছে। যম বাতি নিবিয়ে দেবার জন্যে থেকে থেকে ফরাশ পাঠায়, তবু লোকটা দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়েও চৌকির হাতা আঁকড়িয়ে থাকে। ও যদি মানে মানে নিজেই সরে না পড়ে, আমাদের কর্তব্য ওর সভা ছেড়ে দল বেঁধে উঠে আসা। ... পূজা জিনিসটাকে একঘেয়ে করে তোলার মতো অপবিত্র অধার্মিকতা আর কিছু হতে পারে না। ... ভালো লাগার এভোল্যুশন আছে। পাঁচ বছর পূর্বেকার ভালো-লাগা পাঁচ বছর পরেও যদি

একই জায়গায় খাড়া দাঁড়িয়ে থাকে তা হলে বুঝতে হবে, বেচারা জানতে পারেনি যে সে মরে গেছে। ...রবি ঠাকুরের দলের এই অবৈধ ষড়যন্ত্র আমি পাব্লিকের কাছে প্রকাশ করব বলে প্রতিজ্ঞা করেছি। (রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, নবম খন্ড, পৃ. ৫১১)

অমিত রায় কথার ফুলঝুরিতে অত্যন্ত সাবলীলভাবে আলোকিত করে মেয়েদের মন। এ ব্যাপারে তার ক্ষমতা অসাধারণ, এ প্রসঙ্গে কবি বলেছেন—

> ‘মেয়েদের সম্বন্ধে ওর মন তর্কই করে, মীমাংসায় আসে না। সেইজন্যেই গম্যবিহীন আলাপের পথে ওর এত দুঃসাহস। তাই অতি সহজেই সকলের সঙ্গে ও ভাব করতে পারে, নিকটে দাহ্যবস্তু থাকলেও ওর তরফে আগ্নেয়তা নিরাপদে সুরক্ষিত।’
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> সেদিন পিকনিকে গঙ্গার ধারে যখন ও পারের ঘন কালো পুঞ্জীভূত স্তব্ধতার উপরে চাঁদ উঠল, ওর পাশে ছিল লিলি গাঙ্গুলি। তাকে ও মৃদুস্বরে বললে, “গঙ্গার ও পারে ঐ নতুন চাঁদ, আর এ পারে তুমি আর আমি, এমন সমাবেশটি অনন্তকালের মধ্যে কোনোদিনই আর হবে না।
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> ...

কিন্তু লিলি, কোটি কোটি যুগের পর যদি দৈবাৎ তোমাতে আমাতে মঙ্গলগ্রহের লাল অরণ্যের ছায়ায় তার কোনো একটা হাজার ক্রোশী খালের ধারে মুখোমুখি দেখা হয়, আর যদি শকুন্তলার সেই জেলেটা বোয়াল মাছের পেট চিরে আজকের এই অপরূপ সোনার মুহূর্তটিকে আমাদের সামনে এনে ধরে, চমকে উঠে মুখ-চাওয়া-চাউয়ি করব, তার পরে কী হবে ভেবে দেখো।” (রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, নবম খন্ড, পৃ. ৫০৯)

‘শেষের কবিতা’ উপন্যাসের বাচনভঙ্গি কেবল নয়, এই উপন্যাসের কবিতার ব্যবহারও অপূর্ব। রচনাভঙ্গির আধুনিকতা অনুসরণযোগ্য এবং তা তৎকালে যাঁরা নিজেদের আধুনিক কবি-সাহিত্যিক বলে দাবী করতেন তাঁদেরও চমৎকৃত করেছিল। এই কবিতার প্রেমভাবনা প্রতিটি কবিতার মধ্যে দিয়ে প্রবাহিত হলেও শেষ কবিতায় তা অনবদ্য হয়ে উঠেছে। অমিতকে লেখা লাবণ্যর শেষ চিঠি, যাতে একদিকে আছে শোভনলালের সঙ্গে তার বিবাহের খবর, আর একদিকে এই কবিতা—

“কালের যাত্রার ধ্বনি শুনিতে কি পাও।

তারি রথ নিত্যই উধাও

জাগাইছে অন্তরীক্ষে হৃদয়স্পন্দন,

চক্রে-পিষ্ট আঁধারের বক্ষফাটা তারার ক্রন্দন।

... ...

তোমারে যা দিয়েছিনু সে তোমারি দান—

গ্রহণ করেছ যত ঋণী তত করেছ আমায়।

হে বন্ধু, বিদায়।" (রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, নবম খন্ড, পৃ. ৫৭৩, ৫৭৫)

এইভাবে সমগ্র 'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসে রবীন্দ্র মননের আধুনিকতার নানা দিক প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে। এ প্রসঙ্গে সত্যব্রত দে বলেছেন—

"শেষের কবিতার রচনারীতির অভিনবত্বে প্রকাশিত হয়েছে আরও একটি বৈশিষ্ট্য। গদ্য বর্ণনার ফাঁকে ফাঁকে এতে পাত্র-পাত্রীরা কবিতার ব্যবহার করেছে। এই কবিতাগুলি কিন্তু মোটেই অবান্তর নয়। গ্রন্থখানির সামগ্রিক তাৎপর্য উপলব্ধির জন্যে এই কবিতাগুলি অপরিহার্য। ...উপন্যাসে কবিতার এই ধরনের ব্যবহার— চম্পূরীতির এই অভিনবত্বের জন্যেও 'শেষের কবিতা'র স্বাতন্ত্র্য স্বীকার্য।" (দে, ২০১০, পৃ. ২৯২)

আসলে আধুনিকতা বলতে পুরাতনের প্রতি অশ্রদ্ধা নয়, বরং আধুনিকতা মানে পুরাতনকে শ্রদ্ধা করে নতুনের পথে অগ্রসর হওয়া, যার মধ্যে থাকবে সার্বভৌমিকতা, সর্ব মানবের মুক্তির বাণী। আধুনিক ইংরেজি কাব্য ও তার উপভোক্তাদের স্বরূপ বিশ্লেষণ প্রসঙ্গে বলতে গিয়ে রবীন্দ্রনাথ তাঁর 'আত্মপরিচয়' প্রবন্ধগ্রন্থের অন্তর্গত 'সাহিত্যে আধুনিকতা' প্রবন্ধে বলেছেন—

"আমাদের দেশের তরুণদের মধ্যে কাউকে কাউকে দেখেছি যাঁরা আধুনিক ইংরেজি কাব্য কেবল যে বোঝেন তা নয়, সম্ভোগও করেন। তাঁরা আমার চেয়ে আধুনিক কালের অধিকতর নিকটবর্তী বলেই য়ুরোপের আধুনিক সাহিত্য হয়তো তাঁদের কাছে দূরবর্তী নয়। সেইজন্য তাঁদের সাক্ষ্যকে আমি মূল্যবান বলেই শ্রদ্ধা করি। কেবল

একটা সংশয় মন থেকে যায় না। নূতন যখন পূর্ববর্তী পুরাতনকে উদ্ধতভাবে উপেক্ষা ও প্রতিবাদ করে তখন দুঃসাহসিক তরুণের মন তাকে যে বাহবা দেয় সকল সময়ে তার মধ্যে নিত্যসত্যের প্রামাণিকতা মেলে না। নূতনের বিদ্রোহ অনেক সময় একটা স্পর্ধামাত্র। আমি এই বলি, বিজ্ঞানে মানুষের কাছে প্রাকৃতিক সত্য আপন নূতন নূতন জ্ঞানের ভিত্তি অবারিত করে, কিন্তু মানুষের আনন্দলোক যুগে যুগে আপন সীমানা বিস্তার করতে পারে কিন্তু ভিত্তি বদল করে না। যে সৌন্দর্য, যে প্রেম, যে মহত্বে মানুষ চিরদিন স্বভাবতই উদ্‌বোধিত হয়েছে তার তো বয়সের সীমা নেই, ...সাহিত্য সর্বদেশে এই কথাই প্রমাণ করে আসছে যে, মানুষের আনন্দনিকেতন চিরপুরাতন। কালিদাসের মেঘদূতে মানুষ আপন চিরপুরাতন বিরহ-বেদনারই স্বাদ পেয়ে আনন্দিত। সেই চিরপুরাতনের চিরনূতনত্ব বহন করেছে মানুষের সাহিত্য, মানুষের শিল্পকলা। এইজন্যেই মানুষের সাহিত্য, মানুষের শিল্পকলা সর্বমানবের।" (রবীন্দ্র রচনাবলী, প্রথমখণ্ড, ২০১১, পৃ. ৭৬৯)

'শেষের কবিতা' উপন্যাসে এই আধুনিক প্রেমচেতনার প্রতিফলনই সার্থকভাবে ঘটিয়েছেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ একথা অনস্বীকার্য। তাই রবীন্দ্রসাহিত্য তো বটেই, সমগ্র বাংলা সাহিত্যে 'শেষের কবিতা' নতুনের বার্তাবাহী-আধুনিকের মধ্যেও আধুনিকতম।

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